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Security Council

Seventy-first year

Provisional

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Wednesday, 19 October 2016, 10 a.m.
New York

President:	Mr. Churkin/Mr. Safronkov/Mr. Ilichev	(Russian Federation)
Members:	Angola	Mr. Lucas
	China	Mr. Liu Jieyi
	Egypt	Mr. Aboulatta
	France	Mr. Delattre
	Japan	Mr. Bessho
	Malaysia	Mr. Ibrahim
	New Zealand	Mr. Van Bohemen
	Senegal	Mr. Seck
	Spain	Mr. Oyarzun Marchesi
	Ukraine	Mr. Yelchenko
	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	Mr. Rycroft
	United States of America	Mr. Pressman
	Uruguay	Mr. Rosselli
	Venezuela (Bolivarian Republic of)	Mr. Ramírez Carreño

Agenda

The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question

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The meeting was called to order at 10.05 a.m.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question

The President (*spoke in Russian*): In accordance with rule 37 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite the representatives of Argentina, Bangladesh, Brazil, Costa Rica, Cuba, Ecuador, Guatemala, Iceland, Indonesia, the Islamic Republic of Iran, Israel, Jordan, Kuwait, Kazakhstan, Lebanon, Maldives, Morocco, Namibia, Nicaragua, Norway, Pakistan, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, South Africa, Sri Lanka, the Syrian Arab Republic and Turkey to participate in this meeting.

I propose that the Council invite the Permanent Observer of the Observer State of Palestine to the United Nations, to participate in the meeting, in accordance with the provisional rules of procedure and the previous practice in this regard.

There being no objection, it is so decided.

In accordance with rule 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite the following briefers to participate in this meeting: Mr. Nickolay Mladenov, Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process and Personal Representative of the Secretary-General; and Mr. Stephen O'Brien, Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator.

Mr. Mladenov is joining today's meeting via video-teleconference from Jerusalem.

In accordance with rule 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I also invite the following to participate in this meeting: Her Excellency Ms. Joanne Adamson, Chargé d'affaires ad interim of the Delegation of the European Union to the United Nations; and His Excellency Mr. Mahmoud Saikal, Vice-Chair of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People.

I propose that the Council invite the Permanent Observer of the Observer State of the Holy See to the United Nations to participate in the meeting, in accordance with the provisional rules of procedure and the previous practice in this regard.

There being no objection, it is so decided.

The Security Council will now begin its consideration of the item on its agenda.

I give the floor to Mr. Mladenov.

Mr. Mladenov: I would like to begin by thanking the Council for its support, expressed during the previous briefing, for the work of the Office of the United Nations Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process on the ground under challenging circumstances, particularly as the situation in Israel and Palestine, unfortunately, continues to deteriorate.

International focus on the question of Palestine may have been overtaken by the tragedy in Syria and events elsewhere in the Middle East, but it cannot be allowed to be relegated to a secondary problem. Sadly, settlement announcements, outbreaks of violence and terror, and the absence of visionary leadership continue to define the conflict. The inability to see beyond the horizon and grasp the benefits of resolving the Arab-Israeli conflict, ending the occupation and establishing a two-State solution that meets the national aspirations of Israelis and Palestinians alike is a historic loss to the region as a whole.

The absence of progress has led to growing anger and frustration among Palestinians and profound disillusionment among Israelis. It has strengthened radicals and weakened moderates on both sides. On 9 October, a Palestinian opened fire, killing two Israelis and injuring six others in a terror attack in occupied East Jerusalem. Our thoughts and prayers go out to the families of the victims. Deplorably, Hamas and many others chose to justify and glorify the attack and its perpetrator. This tragic incident once again underscores an undeniable truth — if Palestinians genuinely hope to reach the long-overdue goal of Palestinian statehood and an end to the occupation, that will not be achieved through violence but must be reached through negotiations.

In separate incidents during the recent clashes in East Jerusalem, a 20-year-old Palestinian civilian died after being shot by Israeli security forces. In a separate incident, an unarmed 12-year-old girl was shot in the legs by security guards while approaching a checkpoint.

During the reporting period, Israel has continued with settlement planning, including the recent promotion of an initial 98 out of 300 housing units in Shilo, located deep in the occupied West Bank. If

implemented, that plan will drive a wedge between north and south in the West Bank and jeopardize the contiguity of a future Palestinian State. Israeli officials have defined that move as an attempt to relocate settlers from the illegal Amona outpost, which has been slated for demolition by the Israeli Supreme Court. I once again reiterate the position of the Secretary-General that settlements are illegal under international law and undermine the two-State solution.

Adding to that troubling overall picture, Palestinians have again been unable to exercise their democratic rights after local council elections in the West Bank and Gaza were postponed. The political bickering, mutual accusations, legal challenges and counter-challenges that followed have left the people of Gaza and the West Bank feeling more apart. I am concerned by recent calls by Hamas legislators in Gaza for the Hamas-led Government to resume its work in Gaza. Such a step would seriously undermine the Palestinian Government of National Consensus, and would also make the reconciliation almost impossible.

In August I raised United Nations and international concerns about the steady continuation of Israel's policy of expanding its presence in the occupied West Bank (see S/PV.7762). Today I wish to discuss another impediment to a negotiated solution — the security, humanitarian and political situation in Gaza.

Three deadly conflicts in the past eight years have eroded both Palestinian belief that Israel wants anything more than Gaza's destruction and Israeli conviction that their Palestinian neighbours desire peace. Fuelling Israeli fears is that Gaza is controlled by a de facto authority whose overtly anti-Semitic charter equates resistance with violence, rejects peaceful solutions and aspires to the obliteration of Israel.

Israel accuses Gaza militants of continuously seeking to obtain money and military materiel, including by smuggling in civilian boats, concealing components for the production of rockets inside commercial shipments and diverting construction materials from needy beneficiaries. The United Nations has been informed by Israel of at least 41 serious smuggling attempts that have been intercepted since the beginning of 2016. Although the United Nations lacks the capacity to independently confirm the smuggling accusations, if accurate, they show the intention to continue attacks against Israel.

Last week I travelled to Gaza, where I witnessed warehouses empty of construction materials, as the reconstruction process is significantly slowing down due to limitations of imports. No new residential reconstruction projects have been approved since March. In the recent days the approval of some 80 projects, some of which had already been started, has been revoked by Israel. I saw residential buildings half built. I met with families whose projects had been cleared for reconstruction, yet had not received any cement for months. I heard from those who had tried to navigate the web of rules governing the import of materials considered dual-use, with no luck or response. I stand with the people in Gaza who have suffered through conflicts and closures and who continue to face unimaginable suffering.

At current rates, it will take more than one year to catch up with the backlog of approved projects, and years to address the full housing and reconstruction shortage in Gaza. Those trends are worrying, and I call on the parties to the Gaza Reconstruction Mechanism to recommit once again to ensuring its smooth operation. Failing to do that will put in question the viability of the mechanism and undermine the precarious calm in Gaza.

According to some estimates, in the past decade militants in Gaza have fired nearly 16,000 rockets and mortars at Israel. Approximately 200 projectiles have been fired since the end of the last conflict. While since 2014 there has been little damage or injury, there is an ever-present risk of a potentially catastrophic escalation that neither wants nor needs.

During the 2014 conflict, Israel discovered and destroyed 14 tunnels crossing into its territory, and in May of this year detected and destroyed two more. Allow me to reiterate the joint position of Russia, the United States, the European Union and the Secretary-General as stated in the Quartet report (S/2016/595, annex). The illicit arms build-up and militant activity in Gaza must be terminated. Such actions increase the risk of a new escalation of hostilities, keep thousands of people on both sides of the border under constant threat of attack, and undermine the reconstruction process.

The militant threat, however, should not serve as an excuse for Israel to indiscriminately harm civilians in Gaza. In addition to the continuing severely restrictive closures, I am concerned by persistent incursions and

the almost daily firing and shelling by Israeli forces into Gaza along the fence and at sea.

The vicious cycles of conflict in Gaza must end. To do so control of Gaza must return to a Palestinian Government of National Unity, committed to the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) principles. The closures on Gaza must also be lifted in line with resolution 1860 (2009). Palestinians and Israelis both deserve the right to lead normal lives in freedom and security, with their human rights respected.

Since the takeover of Gaza by Hamas in 2007, 40 per cent of Palestinians living in the occupied territory are beyond the control of the legitimate Palestinian Government. Israel's closure policy and severe restrictions have brought social, cultural and economic interaction between Palestinians in Gaza and the West Bank to a virtual standstill. The widening chasm that has emerged between both parts of the occupied Palestinian territory undermines the national State-building enterprise and threatens the very viability of establishing a united Palestinian State as part of a two-State solution. Unity is therefore critical. I encourage Hamas to pursue reconciliation with Fatah in line with PLO principles and to consider redefining its political stance.

Turning briefly to the Golan, I remain concerned by the volatile situation which undermines the 1974 Disengagement of Forces Agreement and jeopardizes the ceasefire between Israel and the Syrian Arab Republic. It remains critical that the parties to the Disengagement Agreement maintain liaison with the United Nations Disengagement Observer Force, in the first instance, and exercise maximum restraint and refrain from any action that could escalate the situation across the ceasefire line and the already volatile regional environment.

Turning back to the question of Palestine, let me conclude my briefing by issuing two warnings. First, to those who believe that the people of Gaza can be punished by closures or by imposing restrictions on the entry of construction materials that are vital for the economy, they should know that the temperature in Gaza is rising. Allow me to also be abundantly clear to those who build tunnels, fire rockets, smuggle military materiel, profit from the black market or seek to create confrontation. Their actions are dangerous and irresponsible. They are stealing from their own people and risk the lives of Palestinians and Israelis alike.

We must all avoid the risk of sleep-walking into another violent conflict, at a time when the region as a whole needs moderate forces to unite and stand up to the radicalization that we see in the Middle East.

Gaza's future is inextricably linked to the future of the Palestinian people and their goal of establishing an independent State. But the longer its population continues to suffer under the intolerable weight of Gaza's current dynamics, the further Palestinians are from realizing that objective, and the closer we are, unfortunately, to the next major escalation.

The President (*spoke in Russian*): I thank Mr. Mladenov for his briefing.

I now give the floor to Mr.O'Brien.

Mr. O'Brien: I would like to start by thanking Special Coordinator Mladenov for his insightful monthly briefings, which incorporate the humaninatiran situation in a coordinated and comprehensive manner.

The humanitarian needs continue to be far too high. Nearly every resident in the occupied Palestinian territory is recognized as being affected by the protection crisis. Poverty and unemployment have driven more than a quarter of all households to food insecurity. Half a million school children require humanitarian assistance to access quality education. And an estimated 1 million people are in need of humanitarian, health and nutrition interventions. Overall, nearly half of all Palestinians in the occupied Palestinian territories — some 2.3 million out of a total population of 4.8 million — are in urgent need of humanitarian assistance.

In Gaza, humanitarian needs stem from nearly 10 years of closures and restrictions imposed by Israel following the military takeover by Hamas, citing security concerns, and exacerbated by successive rounds of hostilities between Hamas and Israel, internal Palestinian political divisions and Egypt's near-complete closure of its border crossing with Gaza. These events have left half of Gaza's households food-insecure — twice the average rate across the occupied Palestinian territories — with only sporadic access to clean water and regular, reliable electricity.

Seventy per cent of the Gaza population has running water — most of which is not drinkable — for only a few hours every two to four days, while energy deficits leave households with only six to eight hours of power daily. This lack of reliable power places lives

at risk in medical facilities already struggling with a lack of equipment, medicines and skilled staff, reduces the operation of wastewater facilities and undermines the key to breaking Gaza's aid dependency: revitalizing its economy.

In all of this, Gaza's children have suffered the most. A 10-year-old child today has already experienced three rounds of conflict in her short life. Nearly 230,000 children continue to be in need of psychosocial support, and an estimated 250,000 children require mine-risk awareness owing to the prevalence of explosive remnants of war. Israeli children along the Gaza border have been impacted as well and continue to live in fear.

While there has been an increase in the absolute number of exit permit approvals from Gaza since 2012, the acceptance rate for exit permits for medical treatment has reached a seven-year low: of the 2,394 applications made in August, only 60 per cent are approved, compared with some 76 per cent, which was the monthly average in 2015.

Humanitarian organizations provide food assistance to some 1 million people in Gaza each year, while donor-funded emergency fuel, distributed by the United Nations, is keeping critical water, sanitation and health facilities going uninterrupted. I welcome Israel's recent decision to sell an additional 10 million cubic metres of water to Gaza, but we must work towards a sustainable, long-term solution. It is critical that this happen quickly.

The economic reality in Gaza is such that chronic humanitarian needs persist. Gaza's gross domestic product stands at approximately half that of the West Bank, and its unemployment rate is double, at 42 per cent and nearly 60 per cent for youth, one of the highest in the world. Movement and access restrictions on goods and people, albeit variable, not only literally bind most people to an untenable reality in Gaza, but also impede economic activity. More than 1,500 traders and 160 businesspeople in Gaza have lost travel permits in recent months, reversing the trend of increased permit approvals witnessed post-2014. Without the capacity to develop the local economy, a sustainable solution to the humanitarian needs in Gaza will not be possible.

Rebuilding local housing and infrastructure is essential. International support and some relaxation of import restrictions by the Israeli authorities, including through the Gaza Reconstruction Mechanism, have resulted in notable progress in repairing damage to houses, hospitals, schools and critical infrastructure, as well as allowing the highest import levels to Gaza since 2007. However, some 60,000 people remain displaced and have been reliant upon transitional shelter since 2014. Their living conditions raise a range of concerns, including protection risks and gender-based violence. A continued lack of funding to rebuild more than one third of completely destroyed houses leaves over 4,000 families without the prospect of a home in the near future.

If humanitarian needs in Gaza are to decrease, we need development activity and economic recovery. We need tangible improvements to counter the rising tide of hopelessness sweeping Gaza's youth. It also stands to reason from our collective experiences that left unaddressed, this hopelessness of youth will drive more local insecurity and contribute to even more radicalization and exported insecurity. As stated in the Quartet report, the full lifting of the closures is crucial to lasting progress in Gaza, in line with international law and resolution 1860 (2009).

The operating environment for humanitarian action in Gaza has also deteriorated. Access for humanitarian staff in Gaza, for example, has become increasingly problematic. The rate of permits denied to United Nations national personnel based in Gaza rose from 3 per cent in January to 41 per cent in September.

Low-level hostilities between Israeli security forces and Palestinian armed groups in Gaza persist, and concerns remain that insufficient measures have been taken to minimize civilian casualties; patently that is the case when rockets are fired from Gaza into urban settings within range across the border into southern Israel. Chronic concerns remain over the lack of accountability for alleged violations of international law by all parties. The Israeli authorities have opened 31 criminal investigations, but only one indictment has been issued, for a case of looting, out of more than 500 complaints relating to the conduct of hostilities during the 2014 escalation. No meaningful investigations have been announced by Palestinian authorities, and Hamas still holds two Israeli citizens and two bodies of soldiers. I call for their swift return.

Turning to the West Bank, the past year has been the most deadly for Israelis and Palestinians since the end of the second intifada. I continue to be alarmed by Palestinian attacks on Israeli civilians and by the numerous responses to such attacks or alleged attacks

by Israeli forces, many of which have raised allegations about excessive use of force. Recent months have also marked an increase in the use of live ammunition by Israeli security forces, in particular against Palestinian stone-throwers during confrontations. Prosecutions in such cases are rare. In addition, the bodies of 18 Palestinians are still being withheld by the Israeli authorities; I call on the Government of Israel to return them without delay as well.

In the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, this year, the number of structures demolished was already 958 as of 13 October, 75 per cent higher than in all of 2015, with most demolished due to lack of permits. Demolition of donor-funded humanitarian assistance has also spiked, at 271, 150 per cent higher than last year, and there have been more demolitions in occupied East Jerusalem — 147 — than in any year since the United Nations began systematically recording such demolitions in 2008. Overall, 1,447 Palestinians have been displaced, including 719 women and 690 children, with another 5,919 affected, including 1,571 women and 1,763 children, owing to the demolition of livelihood structures. Such demolitions violate international law and must cease immediately; the Secretary-General has called on the Government of Israel to revoke policies and halt practices that may lead to the forcible transfer of Bedouin and herder communities.

In February, I stood before the Council with a clear message: to give this issue the attention it deserves. We need collectively to reverse the core drivers of these humanitarian needs. We must move towards decisive action that will reduce humanitarian needs, secure respect for international law and bring to Palestinians and Israelis alike the hope and reality of a stable, peaceful and prosperous future.

I take this opportunity to briefly update the Council on the humanitarian situation in Iraq, in the context of the military operation to recapture Mosul, which commenced in the early hours of Monday morning. On the third day of operations, reports indicate that military activities remain concentrated in less-populated areas, with no large-scale civilian displacement recorded at this stage.

As hostilities intensify and progress towards densely populated areas, I am extremely concerned for the safety of up to 1.5 million people living in the city. We believe that families in Mosul will be at great risk during the operation of getting caught in cross-fire or being directly targeted by snipers, as they forage for food. We are concerned that civilians may be used as human shields or forcibly expelled and become trapped between front lines. The elderly, the disabled and pregnant women may be unable to move to safety without assistance, and, based on past evidence, the so called Islamic State's practices caused the greatest concern for protection issues.

Finally, nothing is more important than ensuring that civilians are protected and have access to the assistance to which they are entitled during the operation. As the crisis unfolds, I call on all parties involved to uphold their obligations under international humanitarian and human rights law. As humanitarians, even though we wish to see the worst case averted, we are obliged to plan for the worst. We anticipate a displacement wave of approximately 200,000 people over the coming weeks, with up to 1 million people displaced during the course of the operation in a worse-case scenario. Of these people, we anticipate that 700,000 will require shelter and emergency assistance.

Thus far, shelter has been prepared for 60,000 people in camps and emergency sites, and preparation for sites for an additional 25,000 is accelerating. Emergency supplies are being prepositioned close to displacement sites. Mobile clinics and health and protection teams are prepared. Food trucks are on standby. As the winterization of displacement sites becomes a priority and temperatures drop over the coming weeks, needs are expected to rise. In short, as needs rise, so too must the international response.

The President (*spoke in Russian*): I thank Mr. O'Brien for his briefing.

I now give the floor to the Permanent Observer of the Observer State of Palestine.

Mr. Mansour (Palestine): At the outset, I extend Palestine's congratulations to the Russian Federation on its ascension to the presidency of the Security Council and our appreciation for convening of this important debate today. I thank Mr. Nickolay Mladenov, Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process and Personal Representative of the Secretary-General, for his briefing and ongoing efforts including to draw the Council's attention to the critical issues before us. I would also like to thank Mr. Stephen O'Brien, Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator, for his briefing.

I reiterate our deep appreciation to the five Security Council members that co-chaired last week's Arria Formula meeting on Israeli settlement activities, allowing the Council to hear expert presentations on the stark reality and dangers of the ongoing illegal colonization of Palestine on the ground and their effect on the prospects for peace. We thank Malaysia, Egypt, Angola, Senegal and Venezuela for that timely and important initiative.

Reflecting on that meeting and the firm positions reaffirmed by all Council members, along with many recent Government statements made in response to Israeli settlement announcements, it is clear that the settlement issue is not, as cynically claimed by some, a "one-sided" Palestinian issue. As affirmed in every statement, the illegality of settlement activities and the threats posed to the two-State solution and peace prospects are matters of international law and involve all States concerned with a peaceful solution to the Palestinian-Israeli conflict and peace and security in the Middle East.

It is about the law, established by the Member States, and respect for that law. Otherwise, its denigration renders it meaningless and ineffective. That law — namely, the Fourth Geneva Convention, applicable to all States as customary law — was created in the aftermath of the horrors of the Second World War specifically to avert the colonization, oppression and persecution of peoples by foreign Powers occupying their lands. The same law clearly stipulates that occupation is to be a temporary situation, not indefinite or perpetual. That is not a matter of Palestinian opinion, narrative or perspective. It is simply the law.

Yet, as we approach the 50-year mark of Israel's occupation of the Palestinian people and land, the laws governing it have been turned upside down, twisted and exploited by Israel, which has used every pretext — even the most implausible and disrespectful ones — to justify its occupation and all of the human rights violations and war crimes flowing from it and sustaining it for five decades. We must therefore, for the record, reaffirm article 49 of the Fourth Geneva Convention, which strictly prohibits the colonization, construction of settlements, transfer of settlers, forced displacement and transfer of the Palestinian civilian population and all other measures carried out by Israel intended to facilitate and support such actions, including its construction of the wall directly contravening this prohibition.

Under Protocol Additional to the Geneva Conventions of 12 August 1949, relating to the Protection of Victims of International Armed Conflicts, known as Protocol I, these actions constitute grave breaches, which all high-contracting parties are obligated to suppress. Moreover, article 8 of the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court deems as war crimes,

> "[t]he transfer, directly or indirectly, by the Occupying Power of parts of its own civilian population into the territory it occupies, or the deportation or transfer of all or parts of the population of the occupied territory within or outside this territory".

The 2004 advisory opinion of the International Court of Justice was equally clear about these prohibitions, affirming the illegality of Israel's settlements, wall and all related measures aimed at altering the demographic composition, character and status of the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem. Such measures also constitute violations of the Charter of the United Nations.

The international consensus is also clear, as evident in the determination made individually and collectively by States, including in Security Council resolutions, that settlement activities are illegal and constitute a major obstacle to peace. It is also evident in the global calls on Israel to cease all settlement activities and end its nearly half-century occupation. Both are imperative for realizing a just, lasting and comprehensive Palestinian-Israeli peace and an Arab-Israeli peace, in general, and we recall here the Arab Peace Initiative, the importance and centrality of which we underscore.

There can be no question about the clear legal dimensions of the issue, its standing as a peace and security issue, and the international community's duty to act, including, at the forefront, the Security Council according to its Charter mandate. It is therefore quite astounding to hear Israeli claims that any attempts to redress this illegal situation are one-sided Palestinian or Arab attempts and Israeli arguments that the settlements are not an issue. And it is equally disturbing to hear claims that the Security Council has no duty or role on this issue and witness Israel bully States, including permanent members of the Council, warning them not to adopt any resolutions on the matter — in essence demanding of them to ignore and, worse yet, breach their own legal obligations.

Even more appalling is that Israel, which bullies and boasts that peace will not come by resolutions, is the very same Israel that was actually created by a United Nations resolution — General Assembly resolution 181 (II) of 1947, to be precise. That begs the question: How can a State be created on the basis of a resolution while peace cannot? We believe that peace — the central purpose of the Organization — is more than worthy of international legislation and action, and Israel's constant attempts to diminish and divert the United Nations work, in that regard, should be denounced and halted, not rewarded.

Considering the realities of the situation and the dangers of inaction, so starkly highlighted at the recent Arria Formula meeting, we must ask what could possibly justify the continued paralysis of the Security Council in the face of such systematic, aggressive Israeli violations and blatant defiance of the will of the international community. And what could excuse Israel's further appeasement, when its actions are threatening peace and security — the exact purview of the Council — and destroying the two-State solution based on the 1967 borders that have been internationally conceived and endorsed for decades? In addition to defying the law, the premise and arguments presented by Israel defy logic, reason and decency and must be rejected. The Security Council has clear responsibilities, and, once again, we therefore call for urgent action to address the ongoing crisis and injustice.

The 1 July Quartet report (S/2016/595, annex) concluded that Israel's continuing policy of settlement construction and expansion, designation of Palestinian land for exclusive Israeli use and denial of Palestinian development, including the high rate of demolitions, are steadily eroding the two-State solution and entrenching a one-State reality — a reality that any objective observer could only describe as apartheid. In the report and in recent statements, the Quartet deemed the situation unsustainable and called for a reversal of the negative trends on the ground to salvage the two-State solution and create the conditions for meaningful negotiations on all final status issues — refugees, Jerusalem, settlements, borders, water and security — and for tangibly advancing that solution.

The Israeli response to the report, despite the lip-service paid, came in the form of more settlement activities and provocations. Since the report's issuance, plans have been approved for the construction of over 2,000 units in Israeli settlements in Occupied East Jerusalem, the Bethlehem and Nablus areas and elsewhere in occupied Palestine. Plans were also revealed for a new settlement, east of the settlement of Shiloh, on lands of the Palestinian village of Jalud, along with other illegal schemes concerning so-called settlement outposts, further damaging the contiguity and integrity of our land. The recent period has also seen measures aimed at the forcible transfer of Palestinian Bedouin communities from in and around occupied East Jerusalem, including in the sensitive E-1 area, such as the community in Khan Al-Ahmar, along with ongoing threats to demolish Palestinian homes, schools and other civilian structures in Susiya village and to forcibly displace the population.

Those are just a few examples from a year during which we witnessed the unprecedented demolition of Palestinian homes, as mentioned by Mr. O'Brien, the non-stop confiscation of Palestinian land, expansion of Israeli settlements, threats by Israeli officials to annex our land, and constant settler violence and terror, all committed with impunity. At the same time, we witness ongoing provocations and extremist incitement against holy sites in occupied East Jerusalem and Al-Khalil, especially at Al-Haram Al-Sharif, daily military raids in our cities and towns, villages and refugee camps, where Palestinian civilians are assaulted and traumatized by the occupying forces, often resulting in the death or injury; arrest and detention of our civilians, particularly young men and even children, and the beginning of the tenth year of Israel's blockade of the Gaza Strip, where 2 million Palestinians are being collectively punished and besieged, threatened repeatedly by Israeli forces and enduring extreme deprivation and isolation, which has imposed a dire humanitarian crisis and socioeconomic conditions that are at their lowest point since 1967.

In that regard, I must take a moment to appeal for urgent support to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East, which is leading the efforts of humanitarian organizations to alleviate the plight of the Palestine refugees in Gaza and throughout the region, providing them with sustenance, stability and a measure of hope in the midst of intense turmoil and conflict. The Agency needs immediate support to help it to overcome the debilitating funding crisis it faces, which if unresolved will have far-reaching negative consequences.

As our people suffer the endless horrors of such an unlawful, inhumane occupation every day, how can we believe Israel's claimed commitment to peace?

How can we not question Israel's intentions when every policy and measure fragments our land and undermines our State's viability, taking us farther away from the two-State solution, and when its policies and measures violate every human right of our people and deny them any semblance of human dignity, intensifying hopelessness and despair and shaking their convictions in the law and in the possibility of peace?

Faced with continued defiance by the occupying Power, words are no longer enough. Let me repeat — words are no longer enough. The global calls for the cessation of Israeli settlement activities and crimes against the Palestinian people must be backed with serious, practical measures to compel Israeli compliance with the law. There must be consequences if Israel continues to violate international law. Moreover, the international community must determine what actions can stop the downward spiral, stabilize the situation and revive peace prospects. While we echo the Quartet's calls to reverse negative trends and promote confidence-building measures, we must also emphasize the need to restore the political horizon that has been perilously absent for too long.

Efforts to foster conditions conducive to meaningful negotiations will fall short, yet again, without a credible political horizon to move us forward. We must learn the lessons of the past. The political horizon must be firmly based on the long-standing terms of reference based on the relevant United Nations resolutions, including resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973) and 194 (III), among others, the Madrid land-for-peace principle and the Arab Peace Initiative, and must be undertaken within clear parameters and a defined time frame for the conclusion of an agreement. Again, we say in the Chamber, the conflict is not intractable. The solution has long been known; what is missing is the political will that we need.

In truth, the Council's paralysis, coupled with the maliciousness of Israeli actions, its contempt for the law and obstruction of any initiative to resolve the conflict are not only regrettable and frustrating, but would test anyone's resolve and conviction in the rule of law. But we will not be deterred. After all this time, we remain convinced of the primacy of international law and its role in resolving the conflict and ending the injustice. We remain committed to peace and the achievement of a just solution that will ensure the rights of our people, including the right to freedom and self-determination in their State of Palestine, with East Jerusalem as its capital, and secure lasting peace and coexistence between Palestine and Israel and mutual security for our peoples.

We therefore continue to seek Security Council action that is consistent with its pledge to use all applicable diplomatic, political and legal tools to advance those goals. Our current efforts are focused on the Israeli settlement regime, which is something that everyone recognizes as the central pillar of their illegal occupation. Settlement activities make up the main means by which Israel willfully, wantonly and systematically — it involves almost every branch of the Israeli Government — continues to forcibly expandd its presence and entrench its illegal occupation of Palestine. Those are among the means by which it is able to control and oppress the Palestinian population. They are directly endangering the two-State solution based on the pre-1967 borders. How can anyone speak of preserving the two-State solution and progressing towards peace without addressing that matter?

It is for that reason that, with our Arab partners, based on a decision by the Arab Ministerial Committee, we have launched consultations with all Security Council members. The consultations aim at determining a clear course of action to confront the main obstacle to peace and open a political horizon in which a genuine political process can be sustained and expedited for the achievement of a just, peaceful and durable solution. We are doing that responsibly, being guided by international law and the necessities of peace, and are acting in full cooperation with regional and international partners.

Recognizing the dangers of a continuing stalemate and the explosive situation on the ground, we reaffirm our support for the French initiative to mobilize international action for Palestinian-Israeli peace. We concur fully with the urgency of the political horizon and the calls for an international peace conference. We also reaffirm our support and cooperation with efforts by the Arab States to advance the Arab Peace Initiative, including in cooperation with the Quartet members, whose efforts over the recent period are fully recognized, along with the Russian and Egyptian efforts to promote dialogue and help parties overcome the deadlock.

However, none of the efforts can absolve the Security Council from its responsibility. On the contrary, it is imperative that the Council play its role

in order to reaffirm international law, thread together these collective efforts and chart a way forward. In the years of the Council's silence — it has been 22 years — Israeli settlement activities have quadrupled. That is coupled with an intensification of all other violations, which gravely undermines the situation on the ground and deepens the suffering of our people, who continue to be denied their rights and freedom by the illegal occupation, and ushering in of the impending destruction of the two-State solution. The Council must act and should adopt a draft resolution forthwith. That is a minimal expectation. And we appeal to the Council to shoulder its political, legal and moral responsibilities in order to revive the prospects for peace.

Let us not be deterred by the cynics or by the bullying, including those who have the audacity to call our legitimate, diplomatic efforts "terror" — it is a ludicrous argument that we reject, and the Council should do so as well. Such arguments must be rebuked and flatly rejected. The Security Council has a duty to act in line with the law and the urgency of peace and security. It must do so now.

The President (*spoke in Russian*): I now give the floor to the representative of Israel.

Mr. Danon (Israel): Once again, we meet as we continue to hear calls for a one-sided draft resolution against Israel. We have been hearing those calls all year. In fact, we have been hearing calls to act against Israel since we joined the United Nations, 62 years ago. There was a time when Israel could look to this institution with a sense of hope — hope that, after the evils of the Holocaust, the nations of the world could come together to bring about an era of peace, and the Jewish people would finally be free from hatred and prejudice.

But this institution has betrayed those hopes — day after day, month after month, year after year — by funding bodies that promote anti-Israel activism at the United Nations. We see that in the endless stream of biased reports and the one-sided resolutions whose only purpose is to score political points, and not solve pressing problems. When it comes to Israel, the record of hypocrisy and dishonesty goes on and on.

Just last week, UNESCO had the nerve to adopt a resolution denying the connection between the Jewish people and the Holy City of Jerusalem.

> "If I forget thee, O Jerusalem, let my right hand forget her cunning."

That verse from Psalm 137, written by our King David almost 3,000 years ago, was uttered by the Jewish people as they were exiled from Jerusalem following the destruction of their temple. It is also recited by every Jewish groom on his wedding day. UNESCO's decision is an embarrassing stain on the pages of the history of the United Nations. But the Jewish people will endure. The attempts to cut us off from our homeland and our heritage will not succeed. We will remain in our capital, Jerusalem, forever.

As we open the seventy-first session, it is time for the United Nations to answer for the slander and the defamation of the Jewish State by so many here in this building. Let us take a look at that record together.

Just last Friday, this body was witness to a farce. Israeli organizations were called to provide their expert opinions on the latest developments in Judea and Samaria. Let me be clear: Israel is a proud and thriving democracy, and we cherish the freedom of speech. We do not respect those who spread lies and deceit about Israel. In 2016, three United Nations agencies provided funding for B'Tselem. That is no coincidence. It is part of a cynical cycle in which the United Nations funds B'Tselem and similar organizations that have a particular political agenda. They are then invited to provide so-called expert testimony. That is direct interference in our democratic process by anti-Israel elements here at the United Nations. I call on the Council to put an end to funding from the United Nations of extremist organizations that seek to harm Israel.

Last May, at the meeting of the World Health Organization, the General Assembly singled out Israel as the only violator of health rights in the entire world. Apparently, the innocent men, women and children who have been burned and choked to death by al-Assad's chemical weapons are of no concern to the World Health Organization. Last July I visited the hospital in Safed, in the north of Israel. I met with the Syrian people injured in the ongoing civil war who were being treated by Israeli doctors. The World Health Organization did not mention those lifesaving efforts — not even once.

That absurd resolution does not stand alone. The United Nations Commission on the Status of Women concluded its annual session by condemning only one country for violating women's rights anywhere on the planet. The Commission had nothing to say about Iran, where women can face execution by stoning for the so-called crime of adultery. They were silent about places

where forced child marriage, official discrimination against women and so-called honour killings are widespread. Instead, the Organization condemned Israel, where a woman is President of the Supreme Court, where a woman sits as Governor of the Bank of Israel, and where a woman serves as Minister of Justice.

To make matters worse, a Commission on the Status of Women report (E/2016/27) blamed Israel for domestic violence committed by Palestinian men against Palestinian women. Instead of making it absolutely clear that there is never an excuse for violence against women, the report followed the shameful United Nations practice of giving excuses for violence and blaming Israel for every ill in Palestinian society.

The anti-Israel bias is systematic and runs through the organs and bodies of this institution. The Special Information Programme on the Question of Palestine and the Division for Palestinian Rights are the only Secretariat bodies that are dedicated to a specific conflict. And let no one be fooled — they are dedicated to promoting only one side, one narrative and one unequivocal message of anti-Israel propaganda. The United Nations Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People has also disgraced itself with its anti-Israel activity. Non-governmental organizations, accredited to the Committee, regularly post vile images on social media, such as cartoons comparing Israeli soldiers to Nazis. That is pure hatred from official United Nations bodies.

At a time when so many are in need of humanitarian assistance, it is a disgrace that millions of dollars in United Nations funds — money collected from taxpayers around the world — fund bodies whose only purpose is to spread lies, incitement and hateful propaganda against Israel. Yet year after year, the United Nations renews the mandates of those bodies. Year after year the propaganda machine continues.

Just last month, the Department of Public Information organized a United Nations International Media Seminar on Peace in the Middle East in South Africa. The seminar was completely one-sided. Almost all of the speakers were well-known for their anti-Israel positions. The current Palestinian representative to the United Nations, the former Palestinian representative to the European Union and other United Nations representatives and officials were all invited to speak at the seminar. But not a single Israeli official was there to represent Israel, to tell our story. The speakers expressed open support for the notorious Boycott, Divestment, Sanctions movement, which is conducting a global campaign of misinformation and outright slander against my country.

And let us not forget about the United Nations hall of shame, the Human Rights Council in Geneva. Let us call it what it really is, with some of the world's worst human rights abusers condemning the only democracy in the Middle East. The only standard that it follows is the United Nations double standard — one set of rules for Israel, another set of rules for every other country. The Human Rights Council has a special agenda item dealing only with Israel. No other country — neither Iran, Yemen, Syria nor North Korea — none of them is singled out.

As we the General Assembly begins its seventy-first session, we can count on the United Nations to continue that systematic hostility towards Israel. In fact, the bias in United Nations resolutions can actually be counted. General Assembly resolutions have use the term "grave" 513 times to describe Israel's actions — 513 times. And for the rest of the world, for the countries that engage in systematic human rights abuses, in torture and ethnic cleansing — only 14 times. Who will speak out against that moral absurdity? More people have been killed in Syria in the past few months than in the entire history of the Arab-Israeli conflict, yet the United Nations has adopted six times as many resolutions against Israel as it has against all other countries. Not just more than against Syria, but six times as many resolutions against Israel than all other countries on the face of the planet combined.

The box by my side contains piles and piles of United Nations documents — an endless number of pages. United Nations resolutions, reports, declarations, decisions and statements, all denouncing Israel. And that is just from the previous session, from October 2015 until today. Year after year, this institution produces the same documents, filled with the same outrageous accusations and absurd demands. When people speak about the United Nations obsession with Israel, that is what they are talking about. That box is proof of that obsession. It is a monument to the deep-rooted bias against Israel. It makes a mockery of what the United Nations should stand for, and all those who stand by and let it happen year after year should be ashamed.

Let me ask the representatives in this Chamber, let me ask the Palestinian representative, if they really

believe that the ongoing campaign to demonize Israel is doing anything to help the Palestinian people. Do any of those decisions create opportunities for Palestinian women? Do any of those endless resolutions do anything to help a single Palestinian child? Of course they do not. Enough — enough with the incitement, enough with the show. Let the Palestinian leadership start caring about their people. Yes, the Palestinian leadership knows how to mount shows, but it is not helping even one Palestinian. Those thousands of debates and documents do not help the Palestinian people.

Now that we have seen and understood the United Nations shameful record, let us take a look at the real Israel — the Israel that is left out of those reports. For 68 years, the people of Israel have woken up every morning with the threat of war and terror hanging over their heads. Yet, despite all the challenges, we have built a vibrant democracy and a thriving economy. In the twenty-first century, Israel is a place of equality and opportunity. Thanks to the creative spirit and energy of our people, Israeli innovation is helping to improve lives and create opportunities around the world, in agricultural technology, in cybersecurity, solar energy and so many other fields. We are always looking to share what we have learned with others, to build strong and mutually beneficial partnerships with nations around the world.

Now, let us take a look at the countries that are leading the disgraceful campaign of discrimination against Israel. When was the last time we heard of Iran, Libya, Tunisia or Venezuela making any advances in medicine or in water technology that could help the world? Those are some of the nations that are leading the efforts to demonize Israel. Standing back and allowing them to use the United Nations as a platform for their blatant hypocrisy undermines the integrity of this institution.

Anti-Israel bias here at the United Nations is not a law of nature. As Prime Minister Netanyahu said when he came to the United Nations last month,

> "The sooner the United Nations obsession with Israel ends, the better — the better for Israel, the better for other countries, the better for the United Nations itself" (*A/71/PV.14, p. 30*).

There is a way forward. It is time for the United Nations to start thinking outside the box. Those acts of political theatre do not help the Palestinian people, nor do they help to bring the two sides together. But we will not give up. We will continue to fight back against the slander and the lies. The founding vision of the United Nations is still a symbol of hope for the Jewish people, for the State of Israel and for all humankind.

Mr. Ramírez Carreño (Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela) (*spoke in Spanish*): At the outset, we would like to express our gratitude to the Russian delegation in its capacity as President of the Security Council for convening this very important debate so that we can address the very critical situation of the Palestinian people and the Middle East. We would also like to express our gratitude to Mr. Nickolay Mladenov and Mr. Stephen O'Brien for their briefings.

I have the honour to speak on behalf of the Movement of Non-Aligned Countries (NAM) in our capacity as Chair of that group of 120 countries, Member States of the United Nations that make up nearly two thirds of the United Nations membership.

During the seventeenth NAM Summit, held on Margarita Island, Venezuela, the Heads of State and of Government stressed, inter alia, the urgency of achieving a just, lasting, comprehensive and peaceful solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, which is at the core of the Arab-Israeli conflict. The Summit called for a concerted effort by all the parties concerned to achieve that long-overdue objective. The Heads of State and of Government stressed that a peaceful solution to the question of Palestine remained a priority on the Movement's agenda and reaffirmed their principled support for efforts to resolve the conflict, while stressing their readiness to contribute to the achievement of a peaceful solution.

It is on the basis of that clear and comprehensive position, which is in keeping with long-standing principles, that the Non-Aligned Movement has consistently come before the Security Council to urge it to uphold its Charter responsibilities and its numerous resolutions with regard to the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, which, all agree, continues to pose a threat to international peace and security and which requires the Council to act with urgency and responsibility.

NAM reiterates its deep regret that the question of Palestine remains unresolved after the passage of more than 68 years since the 1948 Al-Nakba that befell the Palestinian people. The Movement also expresses its deep regret that, since 1967 — for 49 years, in other words — the Palestinian people have suffered continuously under the brutal Israeli

military occupation of their territory and continue to be denied their fundamental human rights, including the right to self-determination. Incredibly, that brutal military occupation has entered its fiftieth year, and the world stands witness to its entrenchment, in complete violation of international law, including the Fourth Geneva Convention. It also bears witness to the countless violations and crimes being perpetrated by Israel, the occupying Power, in order to impose and maintain its illegal occupation in a belligerent manner.

Each time the Council holds an open debate on the situation in the Middle East, including the question of Palestine, the Movement of Non-Aligned Countries appeals for international attention and for urgent action to address the question of the illegal and brutal Israeli occupation that is causing so much anguish to the Palestinian people and provoking deep anger and frustration and inflaming tensions. The breaches of international law, including humanitarian and human rights law, that are being committed by Israel, the occupying Power, are inflicting widespread human suffering and are deliberately destabilizing the situation, with far-reaching negative consequences for the prospects for a peaceful solution to the Palestinian-Israeli conflict and for peace and security in the Middle East and other regions — goals that everyone in the Chamber professes a commitment to seek.

At every opportunity, we repeat our call to the international community, first and foremost to the Security Council, to act in such a way as to ensure respect for international law, to prevent further deterioration of the situation, including through the the adoption of the measures needed to compel Israel to end its war crimes and human rights violations against the Palestinian people, and to put an end to the illegal foreign occupation of another people's land. We also believe that the Security Council must play its rightful role in advancing a peaceful solution to the conflict and maintaining international peace and security.

It is against the backdrop of those calls, which continue to run up against the paralysis of the Council, that Israel persists with impunity in its disregard of any and all provisions of international law. That includes its illegal settlement activities, whereby Israel continues to confiscate Palestinian land and to build and expand colonial settlements, and erecting its wall on Palestinian land, which continues to reveal the intentions of the occupying Power to continue the illegal seizure and de facto annexation of Palestinian land and to continue undermining its contiguity and the viability of a two-State solution based on the pre-1967 borders. The latest Israeli settlement announcements have further highlighted such ill-intentioned schemes and plans.

Regrettably, the Security Council has failed to uphold its obligations, despite a clear global consensus on both the illegal nature of Israel's policies and practices in the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem, and the urgency of ending the decades-long conflict so that the Palestinian people can finally enjoy the freedom, rights and justice they have been unjustly denied for too long. Israel, the occupying Power, has been clearly emboldened by that inaction on the part of the international community and the lack of accountability.

Consequently, Israel has intensified its illegal, oppressive measures against the defenceless Palestinian civilian population, including, inter alia, by using excessive force against civilians, including women and children, and causing death and injury. Israel continues with its illegal, repressive and punitive measures against the Palestinian people. Examples include home demolitions, the forced displacement of civilians, mass arrests and the detention of civilians, and the inhumane blockade of the Gaza Strip, all of which constitute flagrant forms of collective punishment and cause extreme isolation and suffering for the Palestinian population in the area. The destructive impact of such Israeli violations is immense, as reflected in the enormous tensions and the deterioration of socioeconomic conditions and the intensification of frustrations and despair.

The Movement of Non-Aligned Countries calls for a cessation of all of those illegal Israeli policies and practices against the Palestinian people and calls for respect for international law, including humanitarian and human rights law, and for all the relevant United Nations resolutions. It is unconscionable and unjustifiable to continue to permit such grave and systematic breaches of the law without consequences. The law must be respected and implemented; it is obligatory upon all States. It is not voluntary, and Israel should not be the exception.

The Security Council must act in accordance with its resolutions and the clear provisions of international humanitarian law so as to address the ongoing crisis, rectify the injustice and ensure the protection of the

Palestinian civilian population under Israeli occupation until a peaceful, just and lasting solution is found.

The Council must address, on a priority basis, Israel's violations of international law, in particular the Fourth Geneva Convention and the Council's own resolutions, in order to bring a halt to Israel's ongoing illegal colonization of the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem, which constitutes the source of innumerable other violations, including flagrant human rights violations, by the occupying Power and which are destroying the possibility of the two-State solution approved by the Council's own resolutions, beginning with resolution 242 (1967). That is a minimal and fundamental request to the Security Council that is not beyond the realm of reason or its obligation in this matter.

Finally, at a time when the Palestinian people are facing increasing Israeli aggression and when their hopes for realizing peace and justice are rapidly diminishing, the Movement of Non-Aligned Countries takes this opportunity to reaffirm its long-standing solidarity with the Palestinian people and to recognize their decades of resilience despite so much suffering and injustice. NAM reiterates its support for the realization of their national aspirations and inalienable rights, including their right to self-determination and freedom in an independent and viable Palestinian State, with East Jerusalem as its capital, as well as for a just solution to ease the plight of the Palestinian refugees, in accordance with General Assembly resolution 194 (III). NAM will also continue to offer its support for international and regional efforts aimed at achieving those noble objectives.

Furthermore, Lebanon continues to suffer from continuous Israeli violations of its borders and incursions into its territory, following years of occupation and aggression. Unfortunately, Israel has heightened its incursions into Lebanon by continuing to violate Lebanese airspace. Such activities are a blatant violation of Lebanese sovereignty and the relevant international resolutions, in particular resolution 1701 (2006). The provisions of that resolution should be implemented in a manner that ensures that Lebanon's foundations for stability and security are strengthened, and that prevents Israel from undertaking its daily violations of Lebanese sovereignty.

With regard to the occupied Syrian Golan and especially in view of the recent blatant defiance exhibited against the will of the international community, the Movement of Non-Aligned Countries condemns all the measures taken by Israel, the occupying Power, to alter the legal, physical and demographic status of the occupied Syrian Golan, measures that have intensified since the outbreak of the Syrian crisis. NAM demands once again that Israel abide by resolution 497 (1981) and withdraw fully from the occupied Syrian Golan to the borders established on 4 June 1967, in implementation of resolution 242 (1967) and resolution 338 (1973).

In my national capacity, I wish to highlight the informal meeting on 14 October, which was jointly sponsored by Angola, Egypt, Malaysia, Senegal and Venezuela, on the serious problem posed by the construction and expansion of Israeli settlements in the occupied territories of the State of Palestine. That meeting — considered by the Israeli Government to constitute diplomatic terrorism — was attended by members of the Security Council and the United Nations, and its speakers included the following representatives from civil society: Lara Friedman, Hagai El-Ad and François Dubuisson. It should be noted that, following the meeting, the Israeli Government threatened civil society organizations from Israel and the United States of America.

In their presentations, both the briefers and the members of the Council overwhelmingly agreed that the occupation is the main cause of the precarious situation of the Palestinian people, and that the settlement policy is not only one of the most notorious expressions of the injustice of that reality, but is the main obstacle to peace and thereby to the two-State solution. A relevant remark made by the speakers in the meeting was that the Israeli political establishment does not recognize that its illegal activities have international consequences and they continue to carry them out, without adhering to international legal principles and without paying any attention to United Nations resolutions.

In that context, Venezuela therefore reiterates that the Security Council has a primary and inescapable responsibility to take decisions regarding the prolonged occupation, including the issue of illegal settlements. It is therefore also necessary to overcome the inaction of the Council and take steps to demand an end to the occupation and its related policies. We encourage, and will support, any initiative to adopt a resolution demanding that Israel end its illegal settlement policy. Likewise, we support all diplomatic proposals aimed at achieving a political and peaceful solution to the

Palestinian issue, such as the Arab Peace Initiative and the efforts of the Quartet and the Security Council, and we decidedly support the French initiative to hold an international conference on the Israel/Palestine issue at the end of the year. Moreover, we emphasize the need for the international protection of Palestinian civilians, as called for by the President of the Palestinian National Authority, and demand that Israel put an end to its imprisonment of Palestinian children. More than 400 Palestinian children have been imprisoned by Israel, and we demand that those children be freed.

Finally, our country reaffirms its support for the request of the State of Palestine to be admitted as a full Member of the United Nations. We therefore call on the Security Council to assume its responsibilities in that matter, so that the General Assembly may proceed in accordance with the Charter of the United Nations.

Mr. Delattre (France) (*spoke in French*): I wish to begin by thanking Mr. Nikolay Mladenov and Mr. Stephen O'Brien for their statements, as well as their commitments.

France has long been aware of the alarming fact that the so-called status quo in the Middle East is deteriorating and is doing so on a daily basis, affecting both populations and peace prospects. With each day that passes, the two-State solution — which, now more than ever, should be our collective guide — is further threatened. Clarity is our first joint responsibility. If nothing is done, the fragile horizon of the two-State solution will simply disappear, giving way to a fait accompli in which Israeli security will not be guaranteed and the legitimate rights of the Palestinians will not be exercised. I wish to reiterate that, for France, the one-State solution is not in anyone's interest.

At the Arria Formula meeting last Friday, the findings of Council members were unanimous regarding trends that conspire to threaten the two-State solution. The first of those trends is obviously the continuing settlement policy. What is clear is that settlement is the result of a deliberate and structured policy of the Israeli State. Israel is not just approving building plans, but is also ensuring that settlements are viable, sustainable and part of a tightly woven territorial, road, communication and socioeconomic network that over the years, will lead to a fait accompli and erode the territory of the future Palestinian State. Despite calls from the international community and despite the recommendations of the latest Quartet report (S/2016/595, annex) earlier this month, Israel announced the construction of 98 new housing units near the Shilo settlement, thus building a new settlement. The international community has been unanimous in condemning the decision, which contributes to fuelling tensions and makes the prospects of a viable Palestinian State increasingly unlikely.

Furthermore, acts of violence and the incitement to violence and hatred also jeopardize the ability of the Israeli and Palestinian peoples to sustainably coexist in peace and security, without even mentioning the regular rocket fire on Israel from Gaza. France condemned the fatal attack in Jerusalem on 13 October and is aware that high levels of tension continue, which can erupt in the blink of an eye, as evidenced last year, and can lead to a rapid escalation of violence.

Finally, it is essential to encourage progress in inter-Palestinian reconciliation in order to end the division of the Palestinian territories, on which the two-State solution also depends. Without Palestinian unity there will be no viable peace agreement. In the light of that unchangeable fact and in order to prevent the cycle of violence that Israel and Palestine experienced in autumn 2015 from happening again, our message in recent months has been constant – political dialogue must be reinitiatedand the two-State solution saved. We are convinced that it is the only way of breaking the current deadlock and recreating positive momentum.

This is the thrust of France's initiative. We must first launch a political mobilization. While the peace process has been partially eclipsed by the serious crises shaking the Middle East, our primary objective is to re-establish the conflict at the heart of the diplomatic agenda.

Our second goal is to collectively and unambiguously reaffirm support for the two-State solution, as it is the only solution that will ensure security for Israel and fulfil the legitimate aspirations of the Palestinian people.

The third goal of the French initiative is to promote international support for the parties through a renewed and collective approach, based on a coherent support and incentive mechanism.

It is obvious that peace cannot be imposed on the parties. But we all must recognize that, under the current conditions, an immediate resumption of direct negotiations is not yet possible, owing to the great

mistrust between the parties. Our initiative aims to bring about the conditions, especially political conditions, that will enable a resumption of negotiations, to build consensus around the path to a two-State solution and to promote the convergence of all existing proposals in one direction.

The ministerial meeting held in Paris on 3 June marked the first and essential stage of an international mobilization to save the two-State solution. We will continue efforts, in close coordination with the Quartet and all partners, notably through several working groups that are being established, in order to lay the groundwork for the international conference that France hopes to organize by the end of the year. Our objective is to help the parties understand how peace is in their best interest and how the active support of the international community can assist them, and to get them involved in the next phase of the process. France's approach is resolutely inclusive, and all goodwill efforts are welcome in this joint effort.

France is committed to ensuring the success of the initiative and to bring the parties to resume negotiations for a peace agreement, on the basis of renewed international support and concrete and encouraging proposals. We call particularly for the support of Security Council members. Let us together shoulder our historic responsibility to bringing peace to the Middle East.

Mr. Seck (Senegal) (*spoke in French*): At the outset, I would like to thank this morning's briefers, Mr. Nickolay Mladenov, from Jerusalem, and Mr. Stephen O'Brien, for the clarity of their briefings, which highlight once again the alarming situation on the ground. It continues to be characterized by the pursuit of settlements and violence in one of the most difficult humanitarian situations, particularly in Gaza, all against the backdrop of the deadlock in the political process.

Just one month ago, in this Chamber, the Secretary-General indicated (see S/PV.7774) that, unfortunately, 23 years after the signing of the Oslo Accords, the reality on the ground in the Middle East resembled a one-State solution more closely than the two-State solution that we, the Security Council and the international community, are pursuing.

The Council has regularly considered the intensification and acceleration of settlement-building, especially during this past year. Aside from being illegal, it represents the main obstacle to the two-State solution. Nonetheless, the last Council resolution on the issue dates back to 2009, despite an increasingly untenable situation on the ground. The pursuit of settlements is ongoing, as confirmed by the figures and statistics we heard this morning.

The demolition of houses and structures, as well as administrative restrictions regarding the issuance of construction permits to Palestinians — primarily in Area C, which is completely segmented — resembles a policy of fait accompli. According to the Quartet report issued on 1 July 2016 (S/2016/595, annex), from 2009 to 2013, only 34 of 2,000 Palestinian applications were approved. In 2014, only one was granted, and none in 2015. According to the same report, since the signing of the Oslo Accords in 1993, over 570,000 Israelis have settled in Area C in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem.

At the Security Council's Arria Formula meeting on 14 October, credible presentations were made regarding the rapid and ongoing growth of settlements, including by Israeli organizations that corroborate that trend. Fortunately, while warning about the danger the expansion of the settlements poses both to the two-State solution and the security of Israel, the panellists also showed that practical solutions are still possible. They also called on the Council to take urgent action to end the settlements, which are contrary to international law and Security Council resolutions.

As for the humanitarian situation — which is catastrrophic, particularly in Gaza — in the view of the Senegalese delegation, it is a time bomb, with real risks of increased radicalization and sectarianism. Therefore, Senegal wants that this issue to be permanently included in the briefings of the Security Council.

Beyond mere humanitarian assistance, we must also address the recovery of the Palestinian economy. It is in a difficult situation, primarily as a result of the occupation, but also due to a decrease in assistance from international partners and to the fact that the occupying Power is withholding taxes due to the Palestinian State.

In that connection, the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development, in its annual report on the costs of occupation, highlighted the economic stagnation of the occupied territories of Palestine. According to the report, 1.1 million people living in the West Bank and 1.3 million in Gaza are in need of humanitarian assistance, while the mortality rate has surged from 12

per thousand in 2012 to 50 per thousand today — an untenable situation, as we look towards 2020.

Another illustration of the cost of the occupation is the drastic decline of role of agriculture and industry in the Palestinian economy, which has fallen from 37 per cent in 1975 to 18 per cent in 2014. In those circumstances, it would be impossible for Palestine to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals, despite all governance efforts.

While we reiterate our reproach of hatred, violence and terrorism, whomsoever the perpetrators and whatever the motivations, Senegal must recall that it is the lack of political prospects that breeds extremists on both sides. Administrative detentions, collective punishments, disproportionate use of force and the firing of missiles, besides being violations of international law and human rights, fuel the feelings of humiliation of Palestinians who have been living under occupation for 50 years.

What we need, as the Secretary-General stated so eloquently, are courageous political initiatives on both sides that give peace a real chance, based on a clear political goal leading to a final settlement that leaves no room for violence or terrorism. That is why Senegal once again calls for an end to colonization and the activities related to it with the aim of beginning good-faith discussions according to an agreed-on timetable with specific goals leading to a lasting peace that addresses Israel's security needs and Palestinians' legitimate aspirations to the status of a sovereign State with East Jerusalem as its capital, based on the pre-1967 borders.

In that regard, I reiterate Senegal's hope that despite being postponed, Palestine's local elections will be held throughout its territory and pave the way for reconciliation between the political actors and for forming a Government of national unity. My delegation reiterates its active solidarity with the Palestinian people and thereby reaffirms its support for the initiative that aims to make 2017 the year when we see an end to 50 years of occupation.

We also encourage the Quartet in its efforts and reiterate our belief that in assuming its responsibility, both moral and legal, the Security Council will have the means to play its part as a guarantor of international peace and security with the aim of reaching a lasting solution to this conflict. It is in that spirit that we have taken note of the conclusions of the Quartet meeting held here in September on the margins of the high-level segment of the seventy-first session of the General Assembly, especially its recommendation on improving coordination between the various initiatives under way, such as the French initiative, so admirably outlined by our colleague Mr. Delattre, aimed at convening an international conference for relaunching the process — because, and I am borrowing his words, the status quo is aggression.

For its part, Senegal will also continue to encourage the efforts of the Arab Group and the Russian Federation. In our capacity as Chair of the United Nations Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, we will continue to work to achieve a final settlement through dialogue and consultation that ensures Israel's security as well as the Palestinian people's full and complete exercise of their inalienable right to an independent and viable Palestinian State.

Mr. Rosselli (Uruguay) (*spoke in Spanish*): I would like to thank Mr. Stephen O'Brien, Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs, and Mr. Nickolay Mladenov, Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, for their briefings. I take this opportunity to reiterate Uruguay's full support for Mr. Mladenov in his work.

Uruguay has been following the evolving situation in the Middle East and is extremely concerned about the increasing number of conflicts in the region and the lack of progress that has been made in reaching lasting solutions. This Organization has been trying to find a path to peace in the Middle East since its creation more than 70 years ago, and yet that goal still seems a long way off.

Uruguay once again reiterates its support for the right of Israel and Palestine to live in peace within secure, recognized borders, free of any threat or action that would disturb peace in their territories. To that end, we support a solution based on two independent States, in the firm belief that is the only option that will enable Israel and Palestine to live in peace, side by side. We also believe it is crucial to urge the international community to step up its efforts to support that process and to encourage the parties to return to the negotiating table with the goal of achieving a peaceful, just, negotiated and lasting solution that takes into account the interests of both sides, in accordance with international law. In that context, it is essential to

ensure that both parties create the necessary conditions for resuming direct negotiations and that their actions and policies demonstrate their commitment to a two-State solution.

Uruguay welcomed the report of the Quartet (S/2016/595, annex), which makes a significant contribution to identifying measures to enable progress to be made on resolving the Middle East peace process. In that regard, we are concerned about the report's conclusion that if the current situation continues, a two-State solution will no longer be viable, owing to the continuing violence, terrorist attacks and incitement to violence; the continued policies of expansion and settlement building; the designation of land exclusively for Israel's use and the denial of development for Palestine; and the increase in illicit weapons and militant activity, the continued lack of Palestinian unity and the problem of the humanitarian situation in Gaza.

In that regard, Uruguay remains concerned about the Israeli authorities' decisions to keep building houses in settlements, the most recent of them announced on 4 October for the occupied Palestinian territory in the West Bank. The settlements are illegal under international law and contrary to the Quartet's recommendations. Uruguay therefore reiterates its call on the parties to refrain from unilateral decisions that present obstacles to dialogue and to compliance with their international legal obligations, and urges the State of Israel to stop building illegal settlements.

Uruguay reiterates its firm condemnation of terrorist attacks, in the belief that terrorist and violent extremist attacks on the life and dignity of innocent civilians should not be tolerated anywhere. In that regard, we condemn the attacks on 9 October that took the lives of two Israeli citizens. Similarly, we lament the numerous cases of Palestinians who, despite being unarmed, have died at the hands of Israeli security forces. We welcome initiatives, including those of France and the Russian Federation, that can enable us to make progress in the quest for solutions to the Middle East peace process.

However, none of those actions can replace the sole genuine path to peace represented by direct negotiations between Palestinians and Israelis. In that regard, and in conclusion, I am very proud to cite the hopeful message that has arisen in my own region, specifically in Colombia. Colombia is showing us that peace is possible, but it requires leaders to display the belief and courage needed to take risks in the cause of peace. The four years of negotiations were not easy and even now there are still clouds on the horizon, but the leaders on both sides continue to risk their personal prestige and political legacies in their stubborn and relentless commitment to peace, truly a lesson that hopefully can serve as an example to others.

Mr. Aboulatta (Egypt) (*spoke in Arabic*): The Israeli occupation of Palestinian territory has continued for almost a century. Instead of learning lessons from the protracted history, the complexities of the Palestinian question have increased with time, just as have the efforts aimed at entrenching the occupation and deeming it an irrevocable fait accompli.

The international community repeatedly agreed and reached consensus on what is called the two-State solution — an Israeli State and a Palestinian State — based on the borders of June 1967, with Al-Quds Al-Sharif as the capital of the Palestinian State. Such a solution envisages two States living side by side in peace, where citizens enjoy equal rights, irrespective of their origin, ethnicity or colour.

We have seen international resolutions adopted by the Security Council and the General Assembly, as well as by various entities and international organizations. We have seen piles and piles of political and legal documents that are incontestable and, unlike other cases, unambiguous. We have fully internalized such prescriptions of solutions, just as have those who are closely following the question or even those who are not necessarily directly related to it. Despite the long history and heritage of politically and legally binding prescriptions, and the fact that human nature and conscience reject injustice and favour people's right to self-determination, we continue to meet, deliberate and discuss issues that should be obvious and that have been on the list of the agenda of the Security Council since its inception.

The urgent need to end the occupation — the most protracted and entrenched in modern history — should not become taboo, nor tantamount to provocation. Moreover, it must not interpreted as a measure directed against one group of people or another. To the contrary, the resolution of the Palestinian question and the restoration of land and liberty to the original owners, who continuously suffer behind walls in the West Bank or under siege in the Gaza Strip, is the optimal means for the Israeli people to live in peace with its Arab neighbours, peoples and countries. Such

countries continue to offer their hands in peace, and the unprecedeted positions they have adopted demonstrate their readiness to establish good neighbourly relations with Israel through the Arab Peace Initiative.

On 14 October, members of the Council listened to speakers from different parts of the world — the United States of America, Belgium and even Israel — under the Arria Formula. The meeting confirmed once again, that Israeli settlement activities do not only constitute obstacles to peace and the two-State solution, but they are the very crux of the crisis. The Palestinian question is first and foremost a question of a territory that was occupied by force. It is a question of a people whose right to live in dignity in their homeland was usurped. The meeting also showed us what we should understand and appreciate, and by that I mean pro-peace Israeli voices. Those voices understand that it is impossible for the occupation to continue and for there to be coexistence while there are ongoing attempts to force a fait accompli by dismembering Palestinian land, acting on the policy of home demolition and displacement of families or discriminating in the implementation of laws. Those are the voices that understand that no people can exist at the expense of the rights of other people.

I am confident that the call for peace made by Israel at the United Nations expresses the feelings of a wide sector of the Israeli people, if not the majority. We, as Egyptians and Arabs, are determined to urge that sector and the Israeli people as a whole to continue to march for comprehensive and just peace in the region — the same march that began years ago with the signing of the Egypt-Israel Peace Treaty.

The picture remains bleak. The Palestinians continue to suffer under the yoke of the occupation and its practices and violations. However, it is possible to salvage a settlement provided that there is genuine will. If there are additional calls from Israel for the restoration of Palestinian rights, it would then behoove all of the friends of Israel to adopt the same approach, particularly the influential, major Powers that bear a significant share of the responsibility for the situation. Those Powers provided cover and immunity to the Israeli occupation. And while we encourage and are fully committed to all the current initiatives to salvage the two-State solution and the peace process, and while we are determined to continue to communicate with the Palestinian and Israeli parties in the coming period, the friends of Israel must also realize that we, as Arabs and Egyptians, hope they respond sooner than later to the calls for peace put forth by Palestinians and Israelis. We urge them to work to that end and react favourably, both in and outside of the Security Council, to save Israeli and Palestinian generations from a future that is very difficult to predict.

Mr. Van Bohemen (New Zealand): Let me also like to thank Nickolay Mladenov and Stephen O'Brien for their briefings.

This is the final Middle East open debate of New Zealand's current Security Council term. We think it appropriate, therefore, to reflect on the Council's collective response to the grave and intensifying peace-and-security challenges confronting the region. Over the past two years, New Zealand has sought to challenge the passivity that has often characterized the Council's response to these problems. We have encouraged Council colleagues to focus on identifying practical contributions to preventing and resolving these conflicts, and we have put forward our own ideas for action to support progress. Frankly, it has been an uphill battle.

The forces that gave rise to these conflicts are complex and intractable. And often, the Council has allowed itself to outsource to other players the role envisaged for it in the Charter of the United Nations as the principal international organ responsible for the maintenance of international peace and security. Today I will focus on three specific situations where we need to make progress.

First, on Syria, after more than five years of brutal conflict and intolerable suffering for the Syrian people, it is shocking that those with the power to halt the war continue to delay, equivocate and escalate, rather than genuinely pushing for a political solution. As my Prime Minister underlined to the Council last month (see S/PV.7774), the key steps needed are clear to all: a nationwide ceasefire, negotiations on a meaningful political transition and a united front for fighting the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant and other terrorist groups.

We were deeply disappointed that the efforts by the United States and Russia to chart a way out of the Syrian crisis broke down. We were appalled that the breakdown was followed by a devastating escalation in bombing, particularly of eastern Aleppo. We were outraged that the alleged pursuit of terrorists was used to justify large-scale indiscriminate attacks, for which civilians

have paid the price. And in the face of all of that, the Council has been unable to act, as was demonstrated so clearly 10 days ago. We therefore welcome the resumption of diplomatic efforts in Switzerland last weekend and are encouraged those discussions are continuing. Those taking part in the Lausanne process have the opportunity and responsibility to translate these talks into making a meaningful and sustained difference for Syrians. But so too does this Council.

As is widely known, New Zealand has, with the active support of a number of other Council members, made an effort in recent days to promote a new approach to a possible Council resolution. Our immediate priority has been to de-escalate the current violence, particularly in eastern Aleppo, which could be achieved by ending attacks against civilians. We also wanted to take steps to build trust, for example, through medical evacuations and pauses for humanitarian access.

We have been encouraged that all Council members have been prepared to engage in discussions on our draft resolution. But it has also been apparent that the level of distrust between key players is high, as is scepticism about the prospects for a meaningful outcome. We find that very sad. If we can do nothing, we will only confirm the view prevalent in many of our populaces that the Security Council is not capable of fulfilling its responsibilities under the Charter.

Secondly, with respect to Yemen, 18 months after the actions of the Houthi and their allies tipped Yemen into conflict, all sides to the conflict now need to do much more to pursue a sustainable peace. As in Syria, civilians on both sides have borne the brunt of this conflict. Thousands have been killed. Most Yemenis are now in need of humanitarian assistance. Millions are at risk of famine. And there is an increasingly serious risk of economic collapse, which would further exacerbate the suffering.

Like others, New Zealand was shocked by the coalition air strike against a funeral in Sana'a on 8 October, which resulted in significant levels of civilian casualties. We are encouraged by the Coalition's response in moving quickly to acknowledge its responsibilities and investigate the circumstances of this tragic event. Urgent steps are now needed to ensure such incidents do not happen again and that those responsible are held to account.

But our central focus on the Council must be on ending the fighting. We welcome the ceasefire announced by the Secretary-General's Special Envoy and due to begin later today. We urge all involved to respect its terms and use this opportunity to commit — genuinely and fully — to achieving a political solution. We extend our strong support to the ongoing efforts by the United Nations Special Envoy, the Quad countries, Kuwait and others in the region to maintain momentum towards a political solution to this crisis. The Council must be ready to act in support of their efforts.

Thirdly, with regard to Israel and Palestine, it has been deeply disappointing to witness the continued stagnation of efforts to resolve the decades-old conflict between Israelis and Palestinians. During our time on the Council, we have seen several initiatives to encourage progress, including by my delegation. None has borne fruit in the continued absence of a genuine will by leaders on both sides to make the hard decisions and tough compromises necessary to break the current deadlock and put peace ahead of short-term thinking and self-interest.

I would draw on Amos Oz's recent eulogy for Shimon Peres — where now are the brave leaders who recognize that peace is not only possible but necessary, because the Israelis and Palestinians have nowhere else to go? Instead, what we have seen has been the continuation of actions and trends that take us further and further away from the possibility of a negotiated, two-State solution.

Israel's continued policies of settlement construction and demolitions are particularly concerning, as last Friday's Arria Formula meeting underlined. As my Minister stressed to the Council last month, no amount of spin or any criticism of well-intentioned Israelis and others can hide the fact that these settlements are a violation of Israel's international obligations and have profoundly negative implications for the peace process. The significant expansion of these settlements deep into the West Bank increasingly calls into question the continued viability of any future Palestinian State. We call on Israel to stop the settlements and the demolitions.

Continued inflammatory rhetoric, incitement and acts of violence are also profoundly damaging to prospects for peace. We continue to see attacks on Israeli security and civilians, at times with the tacit acceptance or outright encouragement of elements of the Palestinian leadership. This is unacceptable and is further eroding what trust remains between the parties.

The Palestinian Authority must do all it can to prevent and condemn such attacks.

The only alternative on offer to a two-State solution is a future of perpetual occupation, characterized by endless violence and increasingly brutal oppression. This scenario should provide a compelling rationale for engagement and action by the Security Council. And yet it has been almost eight years since the Security Council last passed a resolution on the issue. In July, the Council was unable even to acknowledge the Quartet's latest report (S/2016/595, annex). We fervently hope that Council members will commit themselves to supporting action to reaffirm the need for a two-State solution and enable practical steps towards making it a reality.

Mr. Oyarzun Marchesi (Spain) (*spoke in Spanish*): I thank Mr. Nickolay Mladenov for his briefing, as well as Mr. Stephen O'Brien. They have described for us in great detail the seriousness of the situation in the Middle East region in general.

This is a debate in which one could speak about the critical situation in Syria, one could speak about the efforts that Jordan and Lebanon have been making to address the refugee crisis, one could speak about the critical situation in Yemen, or one could speak about Mosul, to which Mr. O'Brien has just referred. However, since we have the representative of Palestine and the representative of Israel at this table today, as is customary, and since the Security Council can address the various aforementioned issues on a separate basis, I am now going to focus essentially on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

After receiving all the information we received a few days ago in the Arria Formula meeting on the settlements, it would be difficult to have any doubt that the two-State solution is in serious danger of disappearing as a viable option, and if the two-State solution disappears, it would benefit neither Palestine nor Israel. What is true is that all members of the Security Council have heard and repeated that phrase over and over again for too long. Not surprisingly, last Friday one of the speakers, Mr. Hagai El-Ad, recalled that as far back as six years ago, Vice-President Biden described the status quo as unsustainable. But even if we have been repeating that the status quo is not sustainable so for such a long time, it is not just rhetoric. There are some things that need to be repeated, and I am doing so again today.

First, with regard to the settlements, as we already said on Friday, we believe that Israel should stop the construction of the settlements and the demolition of Palestinian structures. These activities are illegal under international law and constitute an obstacle to peace. We also believe that the expansion of settlements is counterproductive to the Israel's own interests, because, by continuing on this path, the reality on the ground will end up leading to a one-State solution, which would not seem to be the best way to ensure Israel's security, which is also absolutely necessary.

Secondly, the settlements are not the only obstacle to peace. Terrorism is also an obstacle, in addition to being unjustifiable in every case and in all circumstances. I would like to express our condolences to the families of the victims of the attack on 9 October in Jerusalem, for which we express our strongest condemnation. We also condemn the messages of incitement to violence, which we have again heard in recent days. The parties must halt the incitement to violence and refrain from the disproportionate use of force.

Thirdly, we also must not forget that the intra-Palestinian division has as well been an obstacle to peace. We hope that the municipal elections in Palestine can finally take place, as they represent a very valuable opportunity to advance the process of reconciliation among Palestinians, which is of the utmost importance to advance towards peace.

Fourthly, I was greatly moved by the data Mr. O'Brien provided, much of which was not new to me. I will not reiterate it all. But I do wish to recall that 70 per cent of the population in the Gaza Strip does not have regular access to running water, and 40 per cent of those who are ill cannot leave Gaza to obtain treatment. Another 60 per cent of young people in Gaza are unemployed, which means there is no future for Gaza nor for Palestine. Without a hopeful future for the Palestinian people, Israel's security also cannot be guaranteed. What we all want to see is a two-State solution whereby they can live in peace.

The question that naturally arises, which all participants raised in the Arria Formula meeting, is what the Security Council can do to try to prevent that from unravelling. I will not beat around the bush. Again and again, through the months, the Council has debated the question of Palestine and has observed the danger that the two-State solution may no longer be viable. Yet again, Spain has stressed that it believes

that the Council has a role to play on the question and a responsibility to fulfil. We continue to believe that and will continue to do so.

But we should also keep in mind that it is crucial for a possible Security Council statement to be vested with true value added. For that reason, it is also essential for us to carefully consider the right moment and mode of action. In short, once again, we fully agree that it is urgent and extremely important to reverse current trends and to find ways to unblock the peace process. This seems impossible without the international community's agreement and the understanding that the international community cannot impose a solution on the parties. Peace can ultimately be achieved only through direct negotiations between the parties. In that context, the Council must act. In order to do that, it must seriously take into account the various initiatives presented in recent months, while consistently finding ways to strengthen them and ensuring that they leverage their potential complementarity.

In conclusion, we particularly reiterate our support to France in its efforts to organize an international conference. We have always endorsed that initiative, and we also support other initiatives under way, including the work of the Quartet and the initiatives of Russia and Egypt. We also reiterate the importance the Arab Peace Initiative has to jump-start the peace process. In the coming months, we hope that those initiatives will converge in a coherent manner towards the goal we all agree on, that is, none other than to help the parties to overcome the current dynamic of estrangement in order to bring about the necessary conditions to resume negotiations.

Mr. Yelchenko (Ukraine): Ukraine has consistently supported the Middle East peace process and the principle of a two-State solution with Israel and Palestine coexisting in peace and security. The lack of direct dialogue and an almost non-existent political process create an extremely unpredictable and explosive situation. That deteriorating trend has unfortunately become a new normal, thereby making an agreement on the basis of a two-State solution ever more elusive.

On that point we have to state clearly that one of the strongest drivers contributing to today's status quo is the Israeli settlement policy. The announcement on 5 October of Israel's intention to build 300 housing units and to establish an industrial zone in the West Bank is a clear signal of further intensification of settlement activities. Linking a string of outposts in the West Bank, which would effectively divide it, will undermine and potentially even ruin Palestinian State-building efforts, which is yet another hard blow to the peace process.

But terror is not an answer either. Ukraine strongly condemns the shooting that took place on 8 October on Jerusalem's Ammunition Hill, which resulted in Israeli casualties. We are deeply concerned about a vicious circle of escalation that we constantly witness. The often repeated pattern of attacks and counter-attacks demonstrates that the status quo is a road to nowhere. We strongly believe that the Israeli side must demonstrate genuine restraint and refrain from a disproportionate use of force, which could only stir up violence and lead to increased casualties, whereas the Palestinian side must condemn any crime and violent assault perpetrated by Palestinians against Israelis and apply all possible efforts to prevent them. The lack of progress on this track will only play into extremists' hands, who stand to win from a collapse of the peace process. Therefore, halting the violence and de-escalating the situation are immediate priorities. Ukraine reiterates its position that in elaborating a workable Israeli-Palestinian peace agreement, the relevant provisions of respective Security Council resolutions, the Madrid principles, including land for peace, the road map and the agreements previously reached by the parties, as well as the 2002 Arab Peace Initiative, must be respected.

The Middle East is ablaze and suffering from deep and entrenched conflicts that are tearing the region apart and posing a grave danger for the wider international security system. The conflict in Syria continues to spiral out of control, despite all the efforts of most Council members and those of the wider international community. The conflict-settlement mechanism that was built during the past 12 months has failed to bring about the desired result in Syria. The dramatic Security Council meeting on 8 October (see S/PV.7785), and a predictable but nevertheless deeply disappointing fifth use of the veto by the Russian Federation, testify to the bankruptcy of the veto right.

Outside the United Nations framework, the International Syria Support Group platform and the entire Vienna process have not provided the necessary breakthrough either. As a result, we are practically back to square one. We believe that only the full implementation and adherence to the word and spirit of

the 2012 Geneva communiqué (S/2012/522, annex) and resolution 2254 (2015) can lead to the settlement of the conflict in Syria.

Moving on to other regional threats, there is no question regarding the urgent need to put an end to the violence in Yemen. The continued lack of progress in the intra-Yemeni political process is deeply troubling. In that regard, we highly value the efforts by Kuwait and other mediators who are engaged in ongoing efforts to bring about peace. Taking note of the Special Envoy's announcement of a nationwide cessation of hostilities for an initial period 72-hour period, we call on the parties to resume direct talks without preconditions.

Finally, on the spread of terrorism, Ukraine is fully committed to eradicating the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) as a global threat. We are encouraged by the substantial progress achieved by the coalition against ISIL in Iraq and Syria in the past two months. The operation to liberate Mosul has a special significance, given the city's strategic importance. We hope that the liberation of Mosul will become a turning point in degrading and ultimately destroying Da'esh.

In conclusion, I would like to underline that, without a clear way out of the multiple crises that are tearing apart the Middle East, particularly those in Syria, Yemen and Iraq, coupled with the ongoing Israeli-Palestinian conflict, it will be impossible to contain the growing threat of violent extremism and the global spread of terrorist groups, as well as to put an end to the continuing flow of refugees from the region.

Mr. Pressman (United States of America): I thank Special Coordinator Mladenov and Under-Secretary-General O'Brien for their briefings today. Let me begin by discussing the Israeli-Palestinian conflict before moving ont o Iraq and Syria.

We appreciate the briefing that we received today on the troubling political, security, humanitarian and economic conditions in Gaza. More than two years after the last conflict in Gaza, reconstruction efforts are beginning to bear fruit. However, a recent International Monetary Fund report put the area's unemployment rate at a staggering 41 per cent. The United States fulfilled 100 per cent of the $414-million commitment we made at the 2014 International Cairo Conference on Palestine "Reconstructing Gaza", yet of the $3.5 billion in pledges made at the Conference, just 46 per cent have materialized thus far. Words of concern should be matched with real resources.

As some have already mentioned, last week the Security Council held an Arria-Formula meeting on settlements, including panelists from the non-governmental organizations (NGOs) Americans for Peace Now and B'Tselem. As I stated at that meeting and reiterate again today, the United States would like to thank those NGOs for sharing their technical expertise regarding developments on the ground in Israel and the West Bank. Just as we recognize the contributions of non-governmental organizations around the world that are working tirelessly to shed light on difficult issues, it is vital that all Governments promote and protect an atmosphere in which all voices can be heard.

The United States remains deeply concerned about continuing terrorism, violence, incitement to violence and militant activity. On 9 October, a horrific attack in Jerusalem killed two Israelis and injured several others. The United States strongly condemns this act of terrorism and all statements glorifying it, and we send our deepest condolences to the victims and their families.

All Council members must make clear that terrorism is unacceptable and unequivocally unjustifiable. Those who commit or encourage acts of violence send a message that they are not committed to peace. Hamas is a terrorist organization. Hamas clearly opposes efforts to find a peaceful diplomatic solution to the conflict. Hamas denies Israel's right to exist. Hamas has been responsible for the most explicit and widespread forms of incitement and has built up illicit arms and undertaken militant activity in Gaza, obviously refusing to abide by the Quartet principles.

As Secretary of State John Kerry recently stressed, Israel must decide between expanding settlements and preserving the possibility of a two-State solution. Proceeding with steps such as the recent announcement of a new West Bank settlement only moves Israel closer towards cementing a one-State reality of perpetual occupation that is fundamentally inconsistent with Israel's future as a Jewish and democratic State.

Over the past three months, we have seen the advancement of over 2,400 settlement units in the West Bank and East Jerusalem, together with the retroactive legalization of unauthorized settlements and the demolition of nearly 300 Palestinian structures. The United States Government believes that these developments are part of a broader trend of legalizing

outposts, seizing land and expanding settlements, all of which systematically undermine the two-State solution.

The Quartet report (S/2016/595, annex) calls on both sides to take affirmative steps to reverse current trends and advance the two-State solution, but frankly we have witnessed the opposite since the report was released three month ago. As we have stressed, we need to start implementing the two-State solution on the ground right now. The Quartet report includes recommendations that we had hoped the parties would take seriously. We all understand that a permanent status agreement that finally ends the conflict can be achieved only through direct bilateral negotiations between the parties, but significant progress can be made by the parties now that will preserve prospects for two States. The United States will continue to call on both sides to demonstrate, through policies and actions, a genuine commitment to a two-State solution and we will continue to oppose efforts that undermine that goal.

Turning to Iraq, the United States is confident that the Iraqi security forces, including the Kurdish Peshmerga, will prevail in their offensive against Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) in Mosul. But as Under-Secretary-General O'Brien has reminded us today, this will be a hard-fought battle with serious humanitarian consequences. We have all seen the brutal tactics used by ISIL to defend its territory: hiding improvised explosive devices, booby-trapping buildings and deploying civilians as human shields. The United States will continue to urge all parties to comply with international humanitarian law and allow access to humanitarian aid. However, a victory in Mosul will not be sufficient to stabilize Iraq on its own. Member States need to assist with reconciliation efforts that support more inclusive governance in Iraq, which will help to support the communities that have suffered under ISIL terror.

Let me conclude with Syria. Here at the Security Council open debate and tomorrow at a meeting of the General Assembly, all United Nations Member States will have the chance to make their views on Syria heard. Member States must do more than decry the violence; they need to recognize those responsible for it. Russia and the Al-Assad regime have launched an all-out campaign to seize eastern Aleppo by force. As United Nations Special Envoy Staffan de Mistura has said, Russia and the regime cannot use the presence of several hundred extremists as an easy alibi to destroy an area of the city with more than 275,000 civilians whose lives hang in peril.

Anguish over the violence is appropriate, but so too is clarity with respect to who is responsible for it. We must be equally clear that Russia and Al-Assad need to stop hiding behind alibis while their bombs kill and maim children. No more alibis; it is time to stop the bombing of eastern Aleppo.

Russia and the regime have announced a momentary pause in the bombing ahead of an eight-hour humanitarian pause on Thursday. However, Russia's total unwillingness to coordinate this unilateral pause with the United Nations and other partners prevents humanitarian partners from organizing any deliveries of aid. As the United Nations has made clear, an eight-hour pause does not even begin to address the city's humanitarian needs. The last delivery of food there was on 7 July. The remaining food stocks are nearly depleted. A population of hundreds of thousands is about to run out of food and is at risk of literal starvation.

Strikes from the offensive carried out by Russia and the regime have destroyed or damaged every single hospital in eastern Aleppo and killed doctors and first responders. The siege keeps medicine out and traps in at least 200 critically injured Syrians who desperately need medical evacuation. The United Nations has said that there is food and medicine available in western Aleppo, mere meters away, but the Al-Assad regime will not give permission to deliver it. As Al-Assad's cruelty across Syria continues, the regime is besieging 14 other towns with 452,000 Syrians inside, according to United Nations estimates. In these places, we see the same tactics the regime employs in eastern Aleppo — unrelenting air strikes along with denial of aid to communities that are sometimes besieged for years on end.

As the Joint Investigative Mechanism has stated, both the Al-Assad regime and ISIL have used chemical weapons against the Syrian people. We have heard that some may still harbour doubts that Al-Assad used chemical weapons, but these doubts are not grounded in fact. The Council established the Joint Investigative Mechanism to make an objective determination when Council members could not agree upon who was involved in the attacks. Those with doubts may have hoped for different conclusions from the Joint Investigative Mechanism. But they are not entitled to change the conclusions after the investigation — which everyone

on the Council supported — is over. The investigation dictates the conclusions, not the other way around. And the investigation found the Al-Assad regime responsible, together with ISIL. It is therefore time to stop debating the Joint Investigative Mechanism's methodology and begin holding accountable those involved in using chemical weapons.

The United States will do whatever we can to find a political solution to the conflict and end the violence. That is why Secretary of State John Kerry convened a meeting in Lausanne this past Saturday with stakeholders from across the region. But it is a simple fact that for political talks to work, Russia and the Al-Assad regime must stop bombing the people of eastern Aleppo. And there will need to be a true cessation of hostilities across Syria, that is, one that does not allow Russia and the regime to launch the bombardment they have launched under pretence of counter-terrorism.

This week a video, reported to be from eastern Aleppo, emerged. It showed a 16-year-old boy named Marouf dangling by his legs from the top of an apartment building that had been hit by an air strike. Marouf was quite literally hanging in the air with his legs pinned between blocks of concrete and his hands wrapped around bits of rubble. Eventually a first responder managed to pry Marouf free from the rubble with a cherry-picker. I am sorry, but Marouf was no Al-Nusra terrorist when he was pinned under the rubble. He posed no threat to Russia or the Al-Assad regime. Yet there he was, a few inches from plummeting to the ground. Most striking, perhaps, when one watches the video, was Marouf's yellow T-shirt, which had a simple message on it saying "Don't shoot". Of course, the fighter pilots that have dropped bombs on eastern Aleppo could not read Marouf's T-shirt. But we, as Members of this Organization, can reiterate that message and demand that Russia and the Al-Assad regime halt their attacks.

Mr. Lucas (Angola): We align ourselves with the part of the statement made earlier by the representative of Venezuela that was on behalf of the Movement of Non-Aligned Countries.

We are grateful to the briefers in this open debate on the situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question, on which we will focus our attention. Regrettably, Under-Secretary-General Stephen O'Brien and Special Coordinator Nickolay Mladenov were unable to report any positive developments in the region in intra-Palestinian relations and reconciliation, or between Israelis and Palestinians.

We would like to stress at the outset the fact that Angola maintains good relations with Israel and Palestine and that our stance, which we will spell out, is exclusively based on the fundamental duty to uphold justice and the rights of the Palestinian people. Despite our friendly and very fruitful relations with Israel, we are not by any means prepared to appease and condescend to policies that we deem wrong, harmful to international peace and security and, in the last instance, harmful to the Israeli people themselves.

Our tenure in the Security Council ends soon, and it is with sadness and great frustration that we note not only the lack of progress in the Israeli-Palestinian peace process, but a regression in the prospects for a two-State solution and the continuing lack of unity within the Council on how to reverse those negative trends and get the peace process back on track.

The most negative trend is the continued expansion of illegal settlements in Palestinian territories, which maintains an atmosphere of mistrust, hostility and violence among Israelis and Palestinians and the frustration and despair of the international community. We believe that a crucial point in time has come to step up efforts to counter such an unfortunate and dangerous trend. It seriously undermines the prospect for a two-State solution, on which rests the hopes of the international community, of the Palestinians and even of Israelis as the only reasonable outcome for a just and lasting solution to that protracted and distressing conflict and on which to build a stable, peaceful and prosperous future for Israelis and Palestinians.

Once again we would like to stress that such a state of affairs also flows from the persistent lack of unity within the Security Council and the Council's reluctance to hold anyone to account for illegal policies and actions that are in violation of international law. The lack of cohesion within the Council and the double standard applied when it comes to holding selected perpetrators of violations of international and humanitarian law accountable for their deeds are unacceptable and unsustainable. The Middle East Quartet, which the Security Council endorsed as a driving force to bridge the gap between the two sides, has proven powerless in its assertion of principles and strategies for negotiations towards a solution to the conflict.

Symptomatic of such a state of affairs is that since the recent report of the Middle East Quartet (S/2016/595, annex) — which offered recommendations for the way forward — the Israeli Government has increased settlement-related activities, as well as demolitions of Palestinian homes and civilian infrastructure, in total disregard for international initiatives aimed at reviving the peace process. The settlement regime upheld by Israel, which the international community should put at the centre of its concerns, became the pillar of the colonization policies and the means to entrench the occupation of the Palestinian territories by recourse to military force in its systematic expansion of settlements in the occupied West Bank, particularly in and around East Jerusalem. That policy led to the settlement of over half a million Israelis on Palestinian soil, a move in total contravention to the creation of a Palestinian State.

With such a backdrop, we would like to put a few straight questions to Israel. What does Israel intend to achieve with the expanding occupation of Palestinian territories? How does Israel intend to resolve the wrecking of territorial contiguity of Palestine if a meaningful peace process is finally engaged? Does Israel intend to perpetuate the status quo of permanent violence, dissent and the irremediable separation of the two peoples — the Israelis and the Palestinians? With the accomplished facts on the ground towards the effective physical separation of the two peoples, does Israel intend to build an apartheid-style regime? Since the two-State solution seems to vanish under the decisions taken on the ground, does Israel intend to move towards the creation of a one-State solution, embracing Israelis and Palestinians, with equal rights of citizenship and to end the Jewish character of the State of Israel?

Those are candid questions that we raise in order to understand the medium- and long-term purpose of Israeli policies in its relations with the Palestinians and the international community at large.

As always stated, this conflict has global repercussions and time is running out to bring about a meaningful solution to create a viable political horizon. In fact, we currently witness a dangerous descent into chaos in the Middle East region, mainly due to the conflicts in Palestine, Syria, Yemen and Iraq and the volatile political climate in several other countries resulting from mass migration due to those conflicts. In order to counter and prevent further instability and conflicts in the region, we must tackle the root causes: widespread discontent, radicalization and sectarianism.

We therefore support the call for urgent action, by demanding the active mobilization of the international community in order to preserve the two-State solution. International players — particularly the Quartet, the permanent members of the Security Council and regional stakeholders, namely, the Arab Peace Initiative — must do all in their power to restore a political horizon conducive to the revival of the peace process.

We wish to reiterate our support to both Israelis and Palestinians who seek to live side by side in peace and security in their own independent States. The current state of affairs is unsustainable, and we call on both sides to urgently undertake confidence-building measures with policies and actions aimed at creating conditions for direct and meaningful peace negotiations.

Mr. Ibrahim (Malaysia): My delegation is grateful to Special Coordinator Mladenov and Under-Secretary-General O'Brien of the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs for their briefings.

Malaysia aligns itself with the statement delivered by the representative of Venezuela on behalf of the Movement of Non-Aligned Countries and with the statement to be delivered by the representative of Kuwait on behalf of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation.

As this is Malaysia's final quarterly open debate on the Middle East in our capacity as a non-permanent member of the Council, I would like to take this opportunity to make several observations on the Council's approach to the issue of the Palestinian question.

First of all, despite persistent warnings by the Secretary-General and the Special Envoy on the unsustainable situation on the ground and the ever-increasing threats to the two-State solution, it is regrettable that the Council has not been able to offer either effective or even symbolic responses to address the situation. For many years, Council progress on the issue of Palestine was practically nonexistent, which belies the worsening situation on the ground. Mainly this is due to the inability to muster enough political will, or the familiar excuse that the time is not right for the Council to act. Today we expect to hear yet again repeated calls from States Members of the United Nations for the Council not to shirk its responsibility under the Charter of the United Nations and to take

urgent action to salvage the two-State solution. As we speak, more homes are being destroyed, more deaths and despair inflicted.

Secondly, there is a tendency for the Council to accord equal treatment to both the occupying Power and the occupied people when, in reality, no such balance or equality exists. On the one side we have an occupying Power with great military might, which has been occupying a defenceless civilian population for almost half a century. On the other side we have the occupied Palestinians, who live under repressive occupation and a brutal blockade, who face discriminatory treatment and violations of their basic human rights on a daily basis and who are dispossessed of their homes and lands, deprived of natural resources and economic development and restricted in their movement. All of this is inflicting enormous hardship and suffering. It is misleading for us to assume that the occupying Power and the occupied people have the same level of legal, political and moral obligations and responsibilities. Under international law, especially the Fourth Geneva Convention, substantial obligations are clearly imposed on the occupying Powers to protect the general welfare of the inhabitants of an occupied territory. That includes protection from forcible transfer and protection for their property. All of that has been violated. Indeed, the international community did not try to be balanced when we condemned and sanctioned apartheid in South Africa, just as it should not try to be balanced when discussing the Holocaust. What is wrong cannot be right. The sooner we realize this, the clearer our focus on the issue will be.

Thirdly, the Council tends to focus on symptoms of the conflict and conveniently ignores its root causes. It is much easier and more palatable to condemn sporadic attacks and acts of violence than to address the bigger question of what creates, fuels and breeds such anger, frustration and despair in the first place, which has given rise to desperate, albeit violent, responses.

The Secretary-General earlier this year said,

"as oppressed peoples have demonstrated throughout the ages, it is human nature to react to occupation" (*S/PV.7610,2*).

He also said that:

> "[n]o one can deny that the everyday reality of occupation provokes anger and despair, which are major drivers of violence and extremism and undermine any hope of a negotiated two-state solution."

That statement should prompt us to think, reflect and act. It brings a humanistic angle to the conflict that the Palestinians should no longer be denied their fundamental right to self-determination and their quest for statehood. Therefore, unless and until we deal with the root cause of the problem, which is the prolonged and repressive military occupation, the endless cycle of violence will continue and feed into the political narrative of those who thrive on it.

Last Friday, Malaysia, together with Egypt, Senegal, Angola and Venezuela, organized an Arria Formula meeting of the Council on the issue of illegal Israeli settlements. We listened to various experts who provided factual analyses on the worrying developments relating to settlement expansion in the occupied Palestinian territory. Their summation was decidedly clear: the settlement expansion and repression must stop. The politics of yore have no place amid the world's hunger for peace.

I listened carefully to the statement by the Israeli Permanent Representative. Not a single sentence addressed the issue of settlement expansion, which is a top-most concern of the international community. In the coming weeks, we hope to see effective Council action to use the various tools at its disposal to address the issue of settlements. The settlements are not only illegal under international law, they also constitute the most tangible and visible threat to the two-State solution, and therefore to peace in the region.

Clearly, habitual verbal condemnations in the past decades have done nothing to halt or deter illegal settlements activities. Instead, the occupying Power is further emboldened by our inaction and has further sought to legalize outposts and seize more private Palestinian land.

With the recent announcement by Israel to build new settlement units in the occupied West Bank, the ball is now in the Council's court to act urgently, enforce its own resolutions, uphold the rule of law and prove its commitment to the two-State solution. Similarly, the international community should also pursue all legal, political and economic channels to step up its pressure on the Israeli Government to make it too costly for Israel to continue with its illegal settlement policy.

I wish to highlight a recent attempt by a group of 15 women on board a freedom flotilla that sailed from Barcelona and headed for the Gaza Strip last week to highlight the ongoing illegal blockade of Gaza and deliver humanitarian aid. Among them were Northern Ireland's 1976 Nobel Peace Prize winner and Dr. Fauziah Hassan, a female Malaysian doctor. Although their attempt was successfully blocked by Israel, their courageous non-violent resistance managed to raise awareness of the ongoing violations of international law, international human rights law and Security Council resolutions by Israel. It also provided a glimmer of hope for the Palestinians in Gaza, fostered solidarity and conveyed to them that the world had not abandoned or forgotten about them.

We urge civil society worldwide to continue its struggle to call for accountability and to highlight gross violations of international law, including international humanitarian and human rights law, in the occupied Palestinian territory. Its role is especially important in shaping public opinion and providing pressure from the bottom up, in view of the collective failure by Governments and world leaders to take effective action to resolve the conflict. This is not about demonizing Israel. It is about seeking justice and ending the occupation and its repressive nature. It is about seeking a political shift and attitudinal change. It is about creating the enablers and conditions for lasting peace.

In conclusion, I wish to reiterate Malaysia's request that a briefing on the humanitarian situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question, be made a permanent feature of the Council's meetings on the issue. We believe that the humanitarian situation on the ground demands particular attention and a separate briefing by the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs.

Although this is our last intervention as a Council member in the quarterly open debate, Malaysia remains committed to pushing for the establishment of an independent, democratic, contiguous and viable Palestinian State living side by side in peace and security with Israel.

Mr. Liu Jieyi (China) (*spoke in Chinese*): China appreciates Russia's initiative to convene this open debate on the situation in the Middle East. I wish to thank Mr. Mladenov, Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, and Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs O'Brien for their briefings.

The question of Palestine is at the core of the Middle East issue and the source of the problems in the region. Safeguarding the legitimate national rights and interests of the Palestinian people is a shared responsibility of the international community. The current situation in Palestine is dire, with constant violent conflicts, peace talks at a stalemate and a profound humanitarian disaster. The international community cannot stand by while the Palestinian people suffer and the Middle East peace process is stalled. It should take practical steps to push for a settlement of the Palestinian-Israeli issue and the early realization of the two-State solution.

First, we should remain committed to moving in the correct direction of building an independent State of Palestine and achieving peaceful coexistence between Palestine and Israel. The establishment of a fully sovereign State of Palestine based on the 1967 borders and with East Jerusalem as its capital is the inalienable right of the Palestinian people and the key to the settlement of the question of Palestine. The parties should work on the basis of the principle of land for peace, the two-State solution, the Arab Peace Initiative and the relevant resolutions of the United Nations and the Security Council, so as to resolutely push forward the peace process.

Secondly, Palestine and Israel should exercise restraint and continue peace talks, which is the only practical way to resolve the Palestinian-Israeli issue. The fact that the peace talks are stalled can only serve to drag Palestine and Israel into a vicious cycle of esclating violence, which would be a disaster for both sides. Only through an early resumption of talks will it be possible to arrive at a lasting settlement and achieve peace and stability between Palestine and Israel, as well as in the entire region. Israel and Palestine should put an end to violent confrontations. Israel should take the lead to show good faith, cease settlement activities and put an end to the demolition of Palestinian homes, so as to create conditions for relaunching peace talks. The legitimate security concerns of the countries of the region should be respected.

Thirdly, the international community should provide guarantees for the advancement of the peace process. A series of new ideas for a resolution of the Palestinian-Israeli issue were recently raised, including the convening of an international peace conference on the issue and expanding peacemaking efforts on the Middle East. When Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi attended the Middle East peace process ministerial

conference in Paris, he put forward China's ideas for a settlement to the Palestinian-Israeli issue. He called on the international community to explore peacemaking efforts on a broader scale, take follow-up measures for peace talks, and establish incentive mechanisms for peace. China supports all efforts conducive to easing tensions between Palestine and Israel and for the achievement of the two-State solution. We support the establishment of more effective peacemaking mechanisms for the Middle East. We support the Council taking practical steps as soon as possible to actively respond to the legitimate concerns of Palestine and Arab States and play a larger role in pushing the parties concerned to put an end to conflict and restart peace negotiations.

Fourthly, we should continue to push forward economic reconstruction in Palestine. China urges Israel to cooperate with international assistance efforts and comprehensively lift its blockade against Gaza. The parties should respond actively to the United Nations assistance programme for Palestine and engage in economic cooperation with Palestine in order to improve its humanitarian situation and living conditions. China will continue to provide assistance to Palestine and is willing to work within the cooperative framework of our one-belt-one-road initiative to help Palestine achieve economic and social development as soon as possible.

Mr. Rycroft (United Kingdom): I join others in thanking our briefers, Nickolay Mladenov and Stephen O'Brien. I thought it was particularly interesting to hear the considered views of colleagues coming to the end of their two years as non-permanent members of the Security Council.

When we last met here in July (see S/PV.7736), we discussed the Quartet report (S/2016/595, annex). It set out worrying trends for the Israel-Palestine issue, trends that, as the report itself made clear, are eroding the viability of the two-State solution. Since our last discussion there has been an acceleration of some of those trends in the wrong direction, and so we are further still from the ever-elusive two-State solution. I see three areas of particular concern.

The first is settlements. As we saw in the Arria Formula meeting last week, Israel has pushed forward plans for more than 1,500 settlement units, and it continues to demolish Palestinian structures. That runs in direct opposition to Quartet recommendations to cease the policy of systematic settlement expansion and to remove blocks on Palestinian development. This year, as Stephen said, we have seen 958 structures levelled. But they are not just structures, they are homes, shops and schools. This is all part of an Israeli policy that has left 1,000 people displaced, including 690 children. That is 690 members of a generation who currently seem destined to inherit a situation no closer to peace than their parents. With demolition orders issued against the Palestinian village of Susiya and the Kahn Al-Ahmar school, east of Jerusalem, I fear we have not seen the end of this disturbing trend. Livelihoods are on the line just when Israel needs to be building confidence between communities, not demolishing the bedrock on which they are built. The United Kingdom once again urges Israel to cease its systematic policy of settlement expansion, demolition of Palestinian structures and limits on Palestinian development.

Secondly, we are extremely worried, as is Nickolay, about the dire situation in Gaza. It is there where the ramifications of 50 years of strain are most visible. There is a water crisis; far from drinking quality, 90 per cent of the water is not even fit for agricultural use. There is a jobs crisis; unemployment rates are among the highest in the world. And we are on the brink of an even more disturbing crisis: a possible return to war. Anyone sleep-walking into that needs to wake up. The continuing rocket attacks launched by Hamas, and subsequent Israeli responses, demonstrate just how real the risk is.

My third point is that this is not inevitable. Health facilities and schools have been rebuilt in Gaza. Efforts have been made, by both sides, to improve energy supplies for the Palestinian people. Leaders on both sides must seize whatever momentum those small positive developments provide to make strides and progress in other areas. We need to see elections in Gaza and the West Bank. We need to see an end to the hateful rhetoric. And, finally, we must see a return to the negotiating table, to end this conflict once and for all.

I would like to turn our attention to the worst single issue facing the Middle East region — indeed, possibly the whole world — Syria. The suffering of the people of Aleppo has become a weekly focus for the Council. Veto after veto prevent Security Council unity and prevent us from taking action. But we must press forward. There are 100,000 reasons for us to do so — 100,000 children under siege; 100,000 children

struggling without food or medical provisions; 100,000 children living in the wreckage of eastern Aleppo.

These children hold no responsibility for the events that have led to their life in a war zone, and yet the Syrian regime and Russia have consistently chosen to put them at risk. They have chosen to continue to send their jets over the homes of these children, bringing with them havoc and destruction. Russia has chosen to back a regime that employs the medieval tactics of siege and starvation in the pursuit of military victory. What is their rationale for being on the wrong side of history? The excuse — and that is exactly what it is, an excuse — is that the terrorists must be defeated. Of course the terrorists must be defeated. We all agree with that, but it does not justify bombing Aleppo until there is nothing left to bomb.

After its veto, Russia's proposed solution to regain some goodwill is an eight-hour pause, uncoordinated with anyone else. That is wholly inadequate. The United Nations has repeatedly called for at least 48 hours to provide the most basic aid, and even that would not be enough time to address meaningfully the suffering in Aleppo. Sustained access on the basis of a full cessation of hostilities is required. It is within Russia's gift to make that happen. It is not too late.

The Security Council must unite to end the war — unite around a policy to stop the aerial bombardment and shelling of eastern Aleppo immediately and for a lot longer than eight hours. It must do so indefinitely. After five years of bloody conflict — after the deaths of hundreds of thousands of Syrians — we can do better, and those 100,000 children in Aleppo deserve better.

Mr. Bessho (Japan): I would like to begin by expressing our sorrow for the passing of Mr. Shimon Peres, who engaged tirelessly in the Middle East peace process during his long political career. While we mourn his loss, we are deeply troubled by the developments in the region that undermine the prospects for the peaceful solution that Mr. Peres supported.

Japan is alarmed by the continued violence towards civilians, terrorist attacks and incitements to violence. They are fundamentally incompatible with a peaceful solution. We also express our deep concern over the continuing policy of settlement expansion, which is in violation of international law. The expansion of the settlements steadily erodes the viability of a two-State solution and raises questions about Israel's support for such a solution. The dire humanitarian situation in Gaza remains an urgent challenge to be addressed by the international community.

More than two years have passed since the current impasse in the Middle East peace process began. We have seen a vicious cycle of violence and increasing mistrust and frustration between the parties. We must stand firm and continue to encourage the resumption of meaningful negotiations so as not to lose sight of a two-State solution. Leaders on both sides must show serious commitment to the peace process and take concrete steps towards peace. Today, I would like to stress the importance of confidence-building between the parties.

In the year 2006, then Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi of Japan visited Israel, Palestine and Jordan. Mr. Koizumi met in Israel with Prime Minister Olmert and Mr. Peres, who was then Deputy Prime Minister. Mr. Koizumi stressed the need to achieve peace through dialogue. Prime Minister Koizumi asked Mr. Olmert and Mr. Peres for their support and cooperation on a new Japanese initiative called the Corridor for Peace and Prosperity. That initiative is an effort to support economic and social development in Palestine through regional cooperation among Palestine, Israel, Jordan and Japan. The following year, Mr. Peres visited Japan and took part in the launch of the ministerial meeting of the initiative, at which the four partners agreed to cooperate.

It is Japan's belief that in order to achieve a two-State solution, we need to assist Palestinians in realizing sustainable economic development. Such medium- to long-term effort underpins the coexistence of the parties in peace and prosperity. The cooperation among the parties through the initiative helps to build mutual trust, creating an atmosphere that is more conducive to peace.

This year marks the tenth anniversary of the Corridor for Peace and Prosperity initiative. The fifth ministerial meeting was held in September. Today, three Palestinian companies have commenced operations in the Jericho Agro Industrial Park, which is the flagship project of the initiative. Thirty-four other companies have signed lease agreements. The project now creates jobs. The products made in the Agro Industrial Park are now available in local grocery shops, contributing to the local economy. The project has not been an easy one; the achievements were possible only because each party has strived to overcome its concerns in the spirit

of cooperation. We envisage that products made in the Agro Industrial Park will be exported through Jordan to countries of the region and beyond in the years to come. We hope that the Park will grow to become a pillar of the Palestinian economy. We believe that a more prosperous Palestine will contribute to the stability of the region.

We must not let pessimism stall the Middle East peace process. We must continue to move forward. Reversing the negative trend remains an urgent task, and efforts to build confidence between the parties must continue ceaselessly, regardless of the situation we face.

In closing, I would like to stress that Japan, as a member of the Security Council, will continue to actively engage in achieving peace in the region, in close cooperation and coordination with the United Nations and the international community.

The President (*spoke in Russian*): I shall now make a statement in my capacity as representative of the Russian Federation.

We thank the Special Coordinator Nikolay Mladenov and Under-Secretary-General for Humantarian Affairs Stephen O'Brien for their detailed briefings.

The pause in the political process between the Palestinians and the Israelis has lasted too long. The sides need to return to the negotiating table and resume a substantive dialogue on the issue of the final status. Given the deep-rooted antagonism between Ramallah and Tel Aviv, the task will be extremely difficult. We continue to work actively in the framework of the Quartet of international mediators. The publication of its 1 July report (S/2016/595, annex) can, in our opinion, rightly be regarded as a significant event in the context of international efforts on the Middle East peace track. It is important that this document not only reflect the real situation in the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, but also offer concrete recommendations to preserve the prospects for a two-State solution.

It should be frankly acknowledged that at this time the provisions of the document are not being implemented. While not as intense as it was in 2015, violence on the ground continues. The likelihood of a recurrence of last year's confrontation is high, as its root causes have not yet been eliminated. Israel has begun building new housing for settlers in the West Bank and East Jerusalem. The de facto legalization of so-called illegal settlement outposts is occuring even as the Israeli authorities are destroying the homes that Palestinians have built for themselves. The pace at which Israelis are seizing Palestinian land indicates that the point of no return will be reached in the foreseeable future. After that, the only remaining option will be the one-State solution.

It is unlikely that such an outcome would serve Israel, as its leadership has acknowledged, but in its actions Tel Aviv is nonetheless heading down that path. In response, Palestinians are making their cause internationally. They are calling for international pressure to persuade Israel to ensure that peace agreements and the establishment of an independent Palestinian State in the framework of agreed parameters are time-bound objectives. Over all, this is a matter of raising the stakes for both sides.

Against that backdrop, unorthodox steps may be needed to launch a direct political dialogue between the parties. In response to appeals from both the Palestinians and the Israelis, we reiterated our readiness to arrange a meeting between Mr. Mahmoud Abbas and Mr. Benjamin Netanyahu in Moscow, under the auspices of the Russian President. If successful, the meeting could at some point help us to convene an international conference on the Middle East at a certain stage in Moscow. I would like to point out that, at the time it was proposed, that initiative was supported by the Security Council. We believe that Russia's efforts as a country that supports genuine dialogue with all the interested parties can help us make progress with a Palestinian-Israeli settlement.

However, there will be no real prospects for any efforts to resolve the situation in the Middle East unless Palestinian national unity is restored. We consider that issue to be a priority for achieving and implementing a final agreement. We are encouraging the intra-Palestinian opposition parties to work together on the basis of the political platform of the Palestine Liberation Organization and the Arab Peace Initiative. We support the Palestinian leadership's intention to form a national unity Government and hold presidential and parliamentary elections. Overcoming the split between Palestinians by unifying both parts of the Palestinian territories politically under the umbrella of the central Palestinian authorities in Ramallah would help to stabilize the situation in the Gaza Strip, including resolving the enclave's humanitarian issues.

lifting the embargo and restoring the infrastructure that was destroyed in the summer of 2014.

The entire world is watching the conflict in Syria with mounting anxiety — a conflict whose flames have been artificially fanned from outside the country since its beginning. The answer to the question being asked today about who is responsible is clear to the whole world — it is the United States of America and the United Kingdom, who invaded Iraq and have wreaked havoc, along with other activist countries, through an adventurist campaign for regime change in Syria, in which they have not shrunk from supporting openly terrorist groups. The sentimental statement by the United States representative would have more effect if it were not for Washington's actual record and the methods that the United States uses to attain its geopolitical aims — economic suffocation and the indiscriminate use of massive force.

Significant forces of the armed resistance to the current Government, coordinated by the terrorists of Jabhat Al-Nusra, are concentrated in the eastern districts of Aleppo. Those groups have lately been working to nullify international efforts to improve the humanitarian situation and relieve the civilian population. Thousands of people in the eastern part of the city have become hostages to the insurgents, and thousands in the western part are their targets. The representative of the United States virtually asserted that Russia is preventing humanitarian assistance from having access to eastern Aleppo. That is not true. It was the groups holding people hostage in eastern Aleppo who refused assistance from the United Nations in the western part of the city. It was they who would not allow the Castello road to be used for humanitarian aid access. If the United States is so worried about the situation of the residents of eastern Aleppo, why have the American military refused to stand together with Russian forces on the Castello road in order to ensure that that vital artery can function without interruption? Is it out of cowardice, or a desire to foment tensions over Aleppo at any price?

I am also compelled to comment on another unscrupulous move that the representative of the United States made in his statement by attempting to predetermine in advance the conclusions of the work of the Joint Investigative Mechanism regarding chemical weapons in Syria. The United States is systematically attempting to shield the terrorists by assigning a priori blame to Damascus.

Getting back to Aleppo, in the current circumstances, Russia is working intensively to try to halt those negative trends. During months of consultations with the United States, our co-Chair in the International Syria Support Group (ISSG), we worked out a concrete plan for a ceasefire and for improving humanitarian access. Unfortunately, thanks to blatant sabotage, the implementation of the joint agreement of 9 September was suspended. Following a meeting in Lausanne on 15 October of the core of ISSG, an attempt was made to re-start the process with the help of outside actors with direct influence on the armed groups. Mr. Staffan de Mistura, the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General, put forward an interesting proposal for Aleppo. With the aim of successfully implementing the previously announced humanitarian pause planned for 20 October, the Russian and Syrian forces yesterday halted air strikes in the Aleppo area.

The immediate priority is to separate the moderate opposition from the terrorists as soon as possible. That cannot be dragged out any longer. Enough with the ambiguous attitude to terrorists. Those who are prepared to break with Al-Nusra can officially declare their commitment to the cessation of hostilities. In the circumstances, we urge everyone to reject provocative acts and initiatives and incendiary rhetoric. We must put an end to Aleppo's years of tragedy as soon as possible and revive the intra-Syrian political process under the auspices of the United Nations. Boris Johnson, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Great Britain, estimates that there are between 10,000 and 11,000 fighters in Aleppo, but according to United Nations figures, only 900 of them are Al-Nusra terrorists. So if those 10,000 fighters are really trying to defend their city, why have they not driven the Al-Qaida people out? Why would those who are supporting them not urge them to do that?

An enormous amount of attention is now being focused on the campaign that has just begun to liberate Mosul from the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant. We hope that the Iraqi Government succeeds. We presume that the coalition led by the United States has sufficient strength and means to prevent a spillover of terrorists from Iraq into Syria and thence to Europe and the whole world.

We support the resumption of intra-Yemeni talks mediated by Mr. Ismail Ould Cheikh Ahmed, Special Envoy for Yemen. We welcome his announcement on 17 October of the decision of the parties to the conflict to restore the comprehensive ceasefire regime. In that

context, we can only express our profound indignation at and condemnation of the coalition strike that hit a funeral procession in Sana'a, killing about 200 people and injuring more than 500. It is only the cruellest in a series of such attacks. The coalition, which is supported by the United States and Great Britain, must make radical changes to their methods.

We are not encouraged by the situation in Libya, which has resulted from the invasion in 2011 by the countries I cited earlier in a gross violation of Security Council resolutions. It is having an adverse effect on the stability of Libya's neighbours, in fact on virtually the entire African continent. Yet another intra-Libyan clash occurred in Tripoli in just the past few days. Counter-terrorism efforts are fragmented, since the key task of restoring Libya's national armed forces under a single command structure is a long way from happening, and the steps being taken by some of Libya's outside partners in terms of military assistance do not always correspond to that goal. We affirm our position of supporting taking the interests of a broad spectrum of Libyan forces into consideration in the ongoing political process brokered by the United Nations.

Lastly, we hope for a speedy end to the power crisis in Lebanon, which will have a positive impact on the stability of that friendly country.

With that I conclude my statement in my capacity as representative of the Russian Federation, and I now resume my functions as President of the Security Council.

We will now give the floor to non-members of the Security Council. I wish to remind all speakers to limit their statements to no more than four minutes in order to enable the Council to carry out its work expeditiously. Delegations with lengthy statements are kindly requested to circulate the texts in writing and to deliver a condensed version when speaking in the Chamber. I would also like to appeal to speakers to deliver their statements at a reasonable speed so that interpretation can be provided accurately. I wish to inform all concerned that we will be carrying on this open debate through the lunch hour, as we have a large number of speakers.

I now give the floor to the representative of Lebanon.

Mr. Salam (Lebanon) (*spoke in Arabic*): We are meeting today as the great tragedy in Syria continues to unfold, despite the announcement in September by the co-Chairs of the International Syria Support Group, the Russian Federation and the United States of America, that they had reached an accord that included a cessation of hostilities throughout Syria as a whole and in Aleppo in particular. That announcement revived hopes that the violence would decrease and that it would facilitate the delivery of humanitarian assistance to those in need throughout the country. But the continued fighting and the failure by the Security Council over the past few years to address the grave situation in Syria dealt a heavy blow to the hopes of the Syrian people and the international community that the end of this massacre was nearing an end.

Lebanon therefore calls for the Security Council and the International Syria Support Group to redouble their efforts to end the hostilities in order to restart negotiations among the Syrian parties in Geneva, with a view to achieving a lasting political solution, on the basis of the resolutions of the Security Council, that would fulfil the aspirations of the Syrian people to live in safety and dignity in a united, sovereign State.

In response to this terrible, widespread tragedy and the displacement of millions of our Syrian brothers from their cities and villages, the United Nations brought together last September Government leaders and representatives of civil-society organizations in the context of two high-level meetings in order to discuss the wide-scale movements of refugees and migrants. The United Nations is no stranger to dealing with mass movements of refugees and migrants. It has coped with one of the oldest, long-running human tragedies from the very beginning: the tragedy that usurped the Palestinian people's territory, forcibly uprooted them from their land and caused hundreds of thousands of them to become refugees in neighbouring countries, including my country, Lebanon.

Perhaps the aggressive Israeli practices that have been documented in the scores of reports issued by the United Nations and its organs, as well as in those issued by human rights bodies, are the most compelling testimonials of Israel's persistent disregard for the norms and principles of international law and its defiance of the resolutions of the Security Council and the General Assembly. There has been no answer to the requests made by the various investigation commissions to look into practices in the occupied Palestinian territories, or to the appeals made by the Secretary-General.

The State of Palestine is continuing to build up its constitutional institutions and its international legitimacy, despite the fact that its occupied territories continue to be developed by Israeli settlers, according to the briefing given by Mr. Mladenov, Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process and Personal Representative of the Secretary-General. He informed us that the Israeli authorities, from early June through the end of August, had approved 1,000 housing units in East Jerusalem and 735 in the West Bank.

The settlements have been a major obstacle to the peace process, and the continuing settlement policy has undermined the two-State solution. This has been universally condemned by all Member States. The most recent example was the strong condemnation by the United States Administration of the Israeli authorities' decision to build 298 settlement housing units in the West Bank.

Israel continues with its illegitimate practices, flouting its responsibilities as occupying Power. The Office for the Coordination of Human Affairs reported that the Israeli authorities have destroyed 726 Palestinian homes since the beginning of the year. That coincided with an unprecedented increase in violence by Israeli police and army personnel against Palestinian civilians and the adoption of the "shoot to kill" policy.

Time and again, we have cautioned against the increasing terrorism by Israeli settlers as well as the practice of arbitrary detention. We have always stressed that Jerusalem, with all its holy sites, including the Al-Aqsa Mosque, will continue to be the capital of all the faithful. We have called for an end to the Israeli attempts, which have been condemned, to change the pluralistic character of the city of Jerusalem. It should not be made exclusive to any one religion.

In this regard, we cannot but underline the resolution adopted by UNESCO in this regard.

In closing, I wish to reiterate to the Council, which is meeting today in a formal setting, what the Executive Director of the Israeli organization B'Tselem, Mr. Hagai El-Ad, said at the informal Arria Formula Council meeting last Friday, so that his words can be recorded in the annals of the Council:

(*spoke in English*)

> "The reality facing the international community is this: absence of action not only effectively gives the oppressor a licence to proceed without having to suffer too many repercussions, but also gives the oppressor the power to decide when will be the right time to start considering alternatives. 'Wait', demands Israel, 'now is not the right time'. But 'wait' has almost always meant 'never', responds Martin Luther King Jr.: 'The time is always right to do what is right'. That time is now: the time to, at long last, take action. The Security Council has more than just power: it has a moral responsibility and a real opportunity to act with a sense of urgency".

The President (*spoke in Russian*): I now give the floor to the representative of Indonesia.

Ms. Krisnamurthi (Indonesia): My delegation wishes first of all to thank the presidency of the Russian Federation for having convened this open debate. Let me also thank Mr. Nickolay Mladenov and Mr. Stephen O'Brien for their respective briefings. Our appreciation also goes to the five non-permanent members of the Security Council — Angola, Egypt, Malaysia, Senegal and Venezuela — for having conducted the Arria Formula meeting on the issue of settlements. It was an eye-opening meeting that gave us precise and actual facts on the conditions in the occupied territories of Palestine.

We would like to align ourselves with the statement delivered by the representative of Venezuela and that to be delivered by the representative of Kuwait, on behalf of the Movement of Non-Aligned Countries and the Organization of Islamic Cooperation, respectively.

As we all know, in 2017 Palestine will mark the fiftieth year of its occupation by Israel. Throughout those years, a lot of Palestinian blood has been shed and a lot of talking has been done by members of the international community. There have been meetings and proposals and real solutions, but there has been no tangible peace in Palestine. The reports available to us speak of the continued deterioration in the security and humanitarian situation in the occupied Palestinian territory. Worst of all, the denial of the basic human rights of Palestinians by the occupation authorities is, sadly, limitless. We will not and cannot wait another 50 years for the Palestinian people to regain their sovereignty and dignity as an equal member of the international community.

As we gather here in this edifice for yet another debate, the biggest challenges to the two-State solutions are the persistent gross human rights violations and the restriction of access to basic humanitarian requirements

in Palestine. Unfortunately, Israel's illegal settlements and the continued construction of the separation wall remain ongoing features of Palestinian life, as a result of the failure of the international community to find a concrete, practical solution.

Only last month, during the general debate of the General Assembly, Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas urged world leaders to declare 2017 as the international year to end the Israeli occupation (see A/71/PV.14). In that light, we would like to express our support for this notion. It was in that context, and in view of the stalled Palestinian-Israeli peace talks in April 2014, that we were pleased to participate in last June's ministerial meeting on the Middle East peace process, led by France and aimed at finding a path back to the peace process. We therefore welcome the report of that meeting.

Furthermore, Indonesia is on record as having repeatedly called upon the Security Council in recent times to fulfil its responsibility under the Charter of the United Nations for maintaining peace and security and to take action to achieve what is right on behalf of the Palestinian people. We reiterate our conviction that the Organization was founded principally to satisfy the hunger of the peoples of the world for peace and security and to promote the equal rights and self-determination of peoples.

While we do not deny or seek the abrogation of the rights of Israelis, we are firm in our position that the fundamental rights of the Palestinians must be heard. Without any doubt, the task of resolving prolonged conflicts and ending foreign occupation, particularly in the case Israeli-Palestinian conflict, remains the United Nations greatest challenge. While Israel continues to expand its illegal settlements in the West Bank, including Jerusalem, the humanitarian situation in the Gaza Strip following the 2014 war remains desperate. The illegal settlements are a prime obstacle to the peace process and the prospect of achieving a two-State solution.

Moreover, we remind the Council that Israel's continued construction of the separation wall contravenes the 2003 advisory opinion of the International Court of Justice. In the process, Israel is fully restricting the access and movement of Palestinian populations even as its forces revel in violent incursions into the West Bank, killing, injuring and making arrests at will. What we are dealing with is not a mystery. It is about a basic moral obligation that the international community has regrettably failed to uphold. That means it remains a principled challenge for the Council because the Council and no other authority has the responsibility for the maintenance of international peace and security.

It is strange to reflect on the fact that the Security Council alone has adopted approximately 89 resolutions on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, some of which call for the withdrawal of the Israeli occupation force. It is stranger still to consider that neither Israel nor the Council — the very body responsible for those resolutions — has honoured them. History will further question the commitment of the Security Council to the issue at hand.

My delegation welcomes the accession of Palestine to a number of multilateral treaties and conventions, with particular reference to human rights-related instruments, as this works to enhance its status at the United Nations. It is a regrettable fact of history that for over 60 years, the Palestinian people have been living without a homeland. It is time to take seriously the task of advancing the two-State solution.

We therefore call on the Security Council to champion the pursuit of peace as mandated by the Charter rather than the unassigned role of a referee. In our view, only one thing stands between us and the achievement of the two-State vision of Palestine and Israel living side-by-side in peace: political will. Indonesia calls upon the Security Council to summon the political will to implement its own resolutions, which will break the stalemate and impunity and enable the Palestinian people to actualize their dream of a sovereign State of their own.

The President (*spoke in Russian*): I now give the floor to the representative of the Islamic Republic of Iran.

Mr. Khoshroo (Islamic Republic of Iran): The full version of my statement will be made available.

I would like to express my appreciation to you, Sir, and the Russian presidency.

I align myself with the statement made by the representative of Venezuela on behalf of the Movement of Non-Aligned Countries.

The systematic violations of Palestinian rights and international law, including the demolition of homes, the forced displacement of Palestinian civilians, the

arrest and detention of Palestinians, including children, and the incessant violence, terror and provocations by Israeli settlers and extremists, including at sensitive religious sites, particularly at the Al-Aqsa mosque compound in occupied East Jerusalem, have persisted unabated. Over the years, the Israeli regime has continuously intensified its illegal, oppressive measures against the defenceless Palestinian civilian population, including, inter alia, the use of excessive force against children and women, causing more death and injury and depriving them of their right to protection.

The increasing number of illegal settlements in Palestinian territory, which constitute not only grave breaches of the Fourth Geneva Convention, but war crimes, as defined by the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court, have long demonstrated that the Israeli regime has never had any interest in peace with the Palestinians and that its participation in the peace process has been just a cover to hide its policy of aggression.

At the same time, the illegal blockade on the Gaza Strip is causing massive deprivation, hopelessness and a grave humanitarian crisis. The destructive impact of such Israeli violations is immense as reflected in the rising tensions, deteriorating socioeconomic conditions and deepening despair among the Palestinian civilian population living under the nearly half-century Israeli occupation.

While these crimes and policies are worsening, the extremely fragile situation on the ground must be addressed seriously to avert further destabilization. It is unfortunate that they are being perpetrated with impunity and that the international community has yet to take any measure to address them. Regrettably, the Security Council continues to be paralysed, failing to uphold its obligations despite the clear global consensus on both the illegality of Israeli policies and practices on Palestinian territory. The Security Council should uphold the Charter of the United Nations, international law and its obligations to respect and ensure respect of the latter, including through necessary measures to compel the Israeli regime to end its war crimes and human rights violations against the Palestinian people, its illegal foreign occupation of another people's land and the plight of the Palestinian refugees.

The other crises in our region, such as the those in Libya, Iraq, Syria and Yemen, are all examples of crises being stoked through invasion, illegal foreign intervention, terror, extremism and violence. Those problems have persisted and deepened because the international community has failed to do its part in dealing with root causes and the erroneous actions of outsiders and naive trans-regional actors.

The unjustified invasion by the Saudi-led coalition in Yemen has been ongoing for over 500 days. The tragic and horrific air strikes by Saudi jet fighters on a funeral hall packed with thousands of mourners in Sana'a, on 8 October, was another single incident out of thousands over the past 18 months, which have killed or permanently maimed thousands of civilians, including women and children, displaced more than 3 million persons and turned the situation in Yemen from one of deprivation into one of devastation. All those horrendous and heinous attacks, which display a total disregard for human life and international and international humanitarian law are occurring under the watch of Security Council, which is failing to take any action to stop them.

The President (*spoke in Russian*) I give the floor to the representative of Norway.

Mr. Pedersen (Norway): I will not read out my prepared statement.

It has been three months since the United Nations called for 48-hour pauses in the fighting in Aleppo. Since then, another ceasefire in Syria has broken down and a Security Council draft resolution to end the bombardment of Aleppo has been vetoed. That is highly disappointing. It is unacceptable that the fighting continues, the eastern part of Aleppo is in the process of being destroyed and civilians and hospitals, medical personnel and schools are routinely attacked. The bloodshed and the bombing must stop and the massive violations of international humanitarian law must end.

Once again, we underscore that the Syrian regime is obliged, under international humanitarian law, to provide immediate, full, unhindered and sustained humanitarian access to all parts of Syria. We expect the Security Council to fulfil its responsibility and ensure an end to the conflict. The countries in the region, as well as international actors, have a particular duty to secure a credible political process and to ensure that resolution 2254 (2015) is fully implemented. We welcome the resumption of meetings between regional and international actors at the ministerial level.

Norway firmly supports United Nations efforts in Syria on both the political and humanitarian tracks. All actors must work together to ensure that life-saving aid reaches the millions in need. The Syria Humanitarian Response Plan for 2016 has only been 37 per cent funded. Many donors have delivered on the pledges they made in London in February, but humanitarian needs are increasing. Donors must deliver on their promises, and more countries need to contribute. Norway has disbursed 80 per cent of its pledge of $280 million for 2016, and we intend to deliver on our pledge of $1.16 billion over the next four years.

The Ad Hoc Liaison Committee (AHLC) meeting in New York on 19 September was the most constructive meeting in years. The recent agreement on the transfer of authority for the electricity sector to the Palestinian Authority and on electricity debts was indeed important. It proves that economic cooperation between the parties can yield positive results. We urge the parties to continue resolving other outstanding fiscal issues and to agree on key infrastructural projects. The Palestinian Authority will not be able to close the current financial gap by itself. Continued budget support is also needed to enable reform.

The rationale behind the Gaza Reconstruction Mechanism is to prevent unintended use of the building materials entering Gaza. However, the current volume of imported construction materials remains insufficient to meet the needs. An increase in the flow of cement through the Mechanism is urgently needed. The entry of construction materials through other channels is undermining the efforts to address dual use and security problems in Gaza.

Israelis and Palestinians have to address the most imminent threats to the two-State solution. Every announcement of a new settlement and every act of violence corrodes the prospects for a two-State solution and they must end immediately. Our own contribution, through the AHLC, is to underpin the efforts to realize a two-State solution and to advance the Palestinian institutions and economy in preparation for independence.

The President (*spoke in Russian*): I now give the floor to the representative of Pakistan.

Ms. Lodhi (Pakistan): We thank the Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process for his briefing. As that briefing underlined, the response of the international community has not matched the urgency of addressing the grave situation created by the growing violence in the region. The tide of turmoil and conflict, far from receding, has been rising with even greater force and unpredictability. As a consequence, millions of people are having to endure unimaginable suffering, caught up in a vortex of violence now largely being driven by the divergent interests and priorities of embattled Governments and regional and external Powers.

It will be difficult to resolve the series of conflicts and crises afflicting the Middle East and to reverse the rise of terrorism and extremism unless a just and durable solution is found to the Arab-Israeli conflict in the Holy Land. The brutal and prolonged occupation of Palestine and the denial of self-determination and statehood for the Palestinian people is the epicentre and a key source of the conflicts that now consume the entire region. The violence within the Israeli occupied territories will not remain insulated from the conflict raging across Israel's imposed frontiers.

Pakistan rejects the recently announced Israeli plan to construct 300 new settlement units in the West Bank. With every new settlement plan the Israeli Government is systematically sabotaging the possibility of the two-State solution — the only viable option for durable peace and one that has been accepted by the parties, as well as by the international community. But impunity is not limited just to settlements. As Amnesty International pointed out last month, there is also no accountability for extrajudicial killings by occupation forces.

We appreciate last week's Security Council meeting in the Arria Formula format on the issue of Israeli settlements. Yet what is needed now is to follow up the talk with action. The inability of the Council and major Powers to halt the expansion of Israeli settlements and enforce the two-State solution has encouraged the Israeli leadership to entrench its obduracy and intransigence. The Council must categorically reject and condemn Israeli moves to create a fait accompli to defeat the two-State solution. Indeed, the occupying Power should recognize that its political identity would not survive in a one-State alternative. It would only reinforce its character as an apartheid State.

Pakistan remains committed to supporting the Palestinian people in their legitimate struggle for their right to self-determination and statehood. We firmly believe that the creation of an independent, contiguous and viable State of Palestine, based on pre-1967 borders

and with Al-Quds Al-Sharif as its capital, is an essential prerequisite to sustainable peace in the Middle East.

The grim situation in Syria represents the sum of our tragedies: foreign interference, State repression, terrorism, and ethnic and religious divisions. The Syrian conflict, epitomized today by Aleppo, has caused human suffering and a refugee crisis on a scale that is unprecedented since the end of the Second World War. Syria's domestic divisions are now inextricably intertwined with the complex and competing interests and alliances of regional and major Powers.

The challenge the world confronts in Syria is multifaceted. That challenge is to defeat Da'esh and other terrorist organizations; to restore the rights of all of Syria's people, minorities and majorities, while preserving the country's territorial integrity; and to ensure that the sources of terrorism and violence in Syria do not spread to its neighbours and beyond. Pakistan commends the patient and heroic efforts of Special Envoy Staffan de Mistura and urges all concerned parties, including the regional States and major Powers, to work together with the Special Envoy to untangle the vicious web of violence and suffering in Syria.

In Iraq, a diverse coalition is finally imposing military reversals on Da'esh. It is hoped that it will soon be ejected from Mosul. The world welcomes the progressive demolition of the self-styled Islamic State. Its various terrorist manifestations within and outside the region will also have to be contained more vigorously. Military success against Da'esh will also need to be accompanied by credible political measures to reconcile the ethnic and denominational differences within Iraq and the associated rivalries among regional Powers that have prevented the restoration of peace and stability in the country since the 2003 foreign intervention.

The conflict in Yemen has also created devastating chaos and human suffering. The intensity and impact of that conflict has been exacerbated by external factors. The realization of peace in Yemen must be based on the restoration of international legitimacy and the reconciliation of the political, religious and tribal differences within the country. We hope that the ceasefire that is expected to go into effect in a few hours time will be a harbinger of mutual accommodation, leading to enduring change.

Finally, Pakistan has a vital stake in the solution of the multiple conflicts that afflict the Middle East today. We will work with sincerity and purpose to help in any effort to resolve such crises and re-establish peace and security in that central part of the Islamic world.

The President (*spoke in Russian*): I now give the floor to the representative of Brazil.

Mr. Sobral Duarte (Brazil): We thank the Russian Federation for organizing this open debate, as well as Under-Secretary-General Stephen O'Brien and Special Coordinator Nickolay Mladenov for their briefings.

We are distressed by the ever-worsening spiral of violence in Syria. Brazil welcomed the announcement last month of a renewed cessation of hostilities in Syria. The apparent collapse of this promising initiative, only a few days later, was a bitter setback. The destruction of medical facilities in Aleppo, the bombing of Syrian Government positions in Deir ez-Zor, the attack on a humanitarian convoy in Oram Al-Kubra and the shelling of the Russian Embassy compound in Damascus are only the latest unacceptable episodes of a seemingly endless sequence of serious violations of international law perpetrated by all sides of the war.

We are particularly worried by the delay of the Security Council to uphold its responsibilities, in view of a persistent lack of unity among its members. That was confirmed on 8 October, when this body rejected two draft resolutions (see S/PV.7785). Such omission underlines yet again the urgent need to reform the Security Council and to adjust it to the geopolitical realities of our multipolar world.

Tomorrow's informal meeting of the General Assembly on Syria will, we hope, inspire the Council to build consensus and identify new avenues to achieve the long-overdue peace and stability in Syria. Brazil stands firmly in favour of an inclusive and Syrian-led political process that meets the legitimate aspirations of the Syrian people, as established by Security Council resolution 2254 (2015). We urge all parties to cooperate constructively, without preconditions and in good faith, with Special Envoy Staffan de Mistura and to resume the intra-Syrian dialogue. We also stress the need to separate so-called moderate opposition forces from all terrorist groups active in Syria, particularly Jabhat al-Nusra and the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant, as well as the importance of ceasing any support whatsoever to those terrorist entities.

Countries with direct influence on the developments on the ground should resume full dialogue and cooperation in order to revive the cessation of hostilities and tackle terrorism in Syria. That would allow for unimpeded humanitarian access for all Syrians in need and pave the way for the resumption of the peace talks. Brazil has long advocated accountability regarding allegations of war crimes, crimes against humanity, acts of terrorism and other serious violations in Syria. We reiterate such calls today.

The eight-hour humanitarian pause announced for tomorrow in Aleppo is a positive, though limited, step. Other actions could be taken to minimize civilian suffering. We should consider adopting multilateral measures to curb the proliferation and supply of weapons to Syria, including the imposition of an arms embargo, as recommended by the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on Syria. However, existing or new unilateral economic sanctions have a negative impact on the welfare of civilians in Syria and create further barriers to humanitarian assistance and reconstruction activities. We stress that, according to the Charter of the United Nations, the only body with the legal authority to impose coercive economic measures is the Security Council.

Brazil is concerned with recent developments concerning the question of Palestine. Of particular concern is the unrelenting expansion of and official support for Israeli settlements in the West Bank and in occupied East Jerusalem. As highlighted last week by an informal meeting of the Security Council, Israeli settlements in the occupied territories represent a serious obstacle to the peace process. Brazil strongly condemns all recent acts of violence and terrorism in the region, including a shooting attack on Israeli civilians in Jerusalem. Such actions are deplorable and unjustifiable.

Brazil took note of the decision of the State of Palestine to postpone local elections due to legal difficulties and urges all Palestinian actors to overcome their divisions and uphold democracy and national unity.

We welcome recent efforts by Russia, France and Egypt, among others, to promote an atmosphere that is conducive to the revitalization of Israeli-Palestinian negotiations. Nevertheless, no ad hoc initiative can be a substitute for the responsibilities of this Council in resolving the dispute.

We are heartened by reports that the Security Council may soon draft a long-awaited resolution that would define parameters for the peace process. Brazil actively encourages the Council to lead the way towards the creation of a fully independent, free, sovereign and viable State for the Palestinian people within its 1967 borders and in peace with the State of Israel. Reaching such a concrete outcome before 2017 would send a positive signal. The Council has a vital role to play in this regard.

The conflict in Yemen shows no sign of abating. We regret the apparent deterioration of the political process since the end of negotiations in Kuwait. Brazil urges all parties to resume consultations with Special Envoy Ismail Ould Cheikh Ahmed in order to reach a comprehensive agreement. We join the Secretary-General in condemning the airstrikes on a funeral ceremony in Sana'a that reportedly caused over 140 civilian deaths. All actors must abide by their obligations under international humanitarian law.

On Lebanon, we are concerned that the positive momentum generated by the successful local elections could not be translated into a solution for the political deadlock on the national level and the vacancy of the presidency that has lasted two years. The situation creates serious difficulties for the effective functioning of the Lebanese Government, which is already faced with challenging circumstances in its vicinity. Brazil reiterates its commitment to the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon and its support to the Lebanese Government and people.

Nearly one year since the Libyan Political Agreement was signed, the consolidation of the Government of National Accord remains a work in progress. Libya continues to face the political, social, security and humanitarian consequences of the absence of effective State authority. We reiterate our support for Special Representative Martin Kobler and the work of the United Nations Support Mission in Libya. We strongly condemn the recent attempted coup against the Government of National Accord and urge all parties to cooperate towards achieving national and local reconciliation in the country and restoring the national unity of Libya. Recent progress in the fight against ISIL and other terrorists groups should be matched with similar breakthroughs on the political side.

We took note of two important decisions adopted by this Council on Libya. We welcome resolution 2298

(2016), which allows for the removal and destruction of all chemical weapons precursors from Libya. Concerning resolution 2312 (2016), which renewed the authorization for naval operations to prevent migrant smuggling and human trafficking on the high seas off the coast of Libya, let me recall the imperative of protecting the human rights of all refugees and migrants who attempt to cross the Mediterranean, especially the most vulnerable. Migration is not a threat to international peace and security and should not be criminalized.

The President (*spoke in Russian*): I now give the floor to the representative of the Syrian Arab Republic.

Mr. Ja'afari (Syrian Arab Republic) (*spoke in Arabic*): We would like to express our strong denunciation of Mr. Nikolay Mladenov's insistence on ignoring the situation in the occupied Syrian Golan and refusing to explain the United Nations position on the Israeli occupation of the Syrian Golan in accordance with relevant United Nations resolutions, including resolution 497 (1981). That is not to mention his disregard — for perhaps the tenth time — of illegal Israeli practices that continue in the occupied Golan and the ongoing Israeli violations of the 1974 Disengagement Agreement by virtue of its cooperation as an occupying Power with the armed terrorist groups that have occupied positions of the United Nations Disengagement Observer Force on the separation line. That is all in spite of the fact that those issues lie at the heart of this item and represent an important parcel of Mr. Mladenov's mandate as Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process.

Our meeting today coincides with the passage of almost 50 years of the Israeli occupation of Arab territories and the adoption of resolution 242 (1967), and of 70 years since the adoption of resolution 181 (II). In spite of the adoption by the United Nations of hundreds of resolutions over those long decades demanding that Israel end its occupation of Arab territories and end its crimes, successive Israeli Governments have rejected their implementation and have systematically committed documented crimes against international humanitarian law and human rights law that are tantamount to war crimes and crimes against humanity. It has been around half a century of settlement campaigns, the expulsion of Palestinian inhabitants from their homes, the destruction of those homes, the confiscation of lands and properties — more than half a century of total Israeli disregard of the United Nations resolutions on ending the Israeli occupation.

Today the Council has heard the statement of the representative of Israel indicating that all of the United Nations resolutions will not help the Palestinians in the least. For more than half a century, certain influential members of the Council have blindly supported the continued Israeli policy of occupying Arab territories by using the privilege of veto more than 44 times since the inception of the United Nations against draft resolutions on the Arab-Israeli conflict. I say the "privilege" of veto, not the "right" to veto, because I consider it a privilege, as stipulated in the Charter of the United Nations.

Syrian inhabitants under Israeli occupation in the occupied Syrian Golan for more than half a century endure the worst policies of oppression, discrimination, racial discrimination, detention, torture and kangaroo courts; as well as the deprivation of their natural resources, their right to education based on a Syrian national curriculum, and their right to carry the identity cards of their own country, Syria, and to build their own national hospitals in their own territories and villages in the occupied Golan. The Israeli occupation force has also continued its settler expansionist policies with the aim of Judaizing the occupied Syrian Golan, in total disregard of international resolutions.

The Israeli occupation Government has recently granted priority to settlements in the Golan in its budgetary disbursements. In its latest provocative meeting, held in April in the Golan — a meeting that did not attract the attention of anyone in the Secretariat or in the Department of Peacekeeping Operations, and was not noticed by Mr. Mladenov either — Israel provided new settlers with great incentives, such as tax exemptions and assistance in establishing agricultural projects, and endorsed the construction of thousands of housing units in the occupied Syrian Golan, just as it does in occupied Jerusalem and occupied Palestinian territories, in flagrant violation of United Nations resolutions.

I note that the chairman of the municipality of the Katzrin settlement in the occupied Syrian Golan recently announced the construction of 4,000 new housing units, indicating that the expansion falls on the fortieth anniversary of the beginning of the Israeli settlement in Katzrin, which was built on the remains

of the razed Syrian villages of Qisrin, Al-Shoukif and Aldoura.

Since the beginning of the events in Syria, Israel, the occupying Power, has opened a new chapter of aggression and of violation of the Disengagement Agreement and of Security Council resolutions, particularly those relating to fighting terrorism. It has provided armed terrorist groups — including the Al-Nusra Front, which is registered on the Security Council's list of terrorist entities — with all sorts of assistance and support along the ceasefire line in the occupied Syrian Golan. It has continued to communicate with those terrorist groups across the ceasefire line, facilitating their movement from south to north. It has supported them logistically and medically, in public and on Israeli TV screens, by transferring the injured terrorists across the ceasefire line to treat them in Israeli hospitals at the expense of the Qatari regime, then returning them to Syria to pursue their terrorist activities, as documented by all United Nations reports. Nonetheless, they were not noted by Mr. Mladenov.

We note that Israeli support to terrorists not only is a flagrant violation of the disengagement agreement, the mandate of the United Nations Disengagement Observer Force (UNDOF) and international law, but also exposes the lives of United Nations workers to great danger and undermines their mission, as has already happened several times with regard to those terrorist groups that have kidnapped UNDOF peacekeepers or fired at them and targeted their positions. We have reported all those details to the Department of Peacekeeping Operations (DPKO), including the collusion by Qatari intelligence in the kidnapping of UNDOF peacekeepers of the Philippine regiment. We have requested an investigation, but we are still waiting for Godot — that is, for DPKO — to come and conduct the investigation.

The Israeli occupation forces have sought recently to spread their influence in the Yarmouk and Raqqa valleys near the Dera'a region, adjacent to the occupied Syrian Golan and the Syrian-Jordanian borders, in collusion with the Al-Nusra Front and all related groups. They are attempting to force the inhabitants to leave the area by depriving them of their basic daily needs and confiscating their homes if they are away for more than two days, and preventing them from returning to these homes. The Syrian Arab army does all it can to prevent Israel and those terrorists who collude with it from implementing their aggressive design. In scores of letters we have reported documented information on those Israeli aggressions and violations. We are still waiting for the Security Council to take immediate measures against Israel to force it to put an end to its aggression and its violations and to force it to withdraw from the entire Syrian Golan to the line of 4 June 1967, in accordance with resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973) and 497 (1981).

The President (*spoke in Russian*): I now give the floor to observer of the Holy See.

Archbishop Auza (Holy See) (*spoke in Arabic*): My delegation thanks the presidency of the Russian Federation for organizing the open debate on the item "The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question" and for calling the attention of the entire international community to this issue.

The gradual movement away from the two-State solution proposed by the United Nations in 1947 is a cause for very grave concern. The straying from the Madrid Peace Process and the Oslo Accords of the 1990s has served to increase the level of frustration and desperation among the Palestinian people. A unity Government in the West Bank and Gaza is essential for advancing the negotiations and for bringing peace and prosperity to its people. It is the responsibility of the international community to respond generously to the appeal launched recently by the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East in order to face the ever-growing humanitarian needs.

My delegation would like to underline once again that the Holy See believes that the two-State solution holds the best promise. If Israel and Palestine do not agree to exist side by side, reconciled and sovereign, within mutually agreed and internationally recognized borders, peace will remain a distant dream and security an illusion. While the focus of today's debate is how to urge Israel and Palestine to stop making unilateral decisions and taking independent actions that endanger the resumption of meaningful negotiations, the Palestinian question can be viewed only as part of the Middle East conflict.

The Middle East is the cradle of civilizations and the birthplace of Judaism, Christianity and Islam, and yet it has become a theatre of incredible barbarism. Utter disregard for international humanitarian law has reached new levels of barbarity. Corpses buried under ruins and drifting refugees are clear evidence of the cynical contempt for and violation of international

humanitarian law. Pope Francis has reiterated his appeal for an immediate ceasefire in Aleppo and other parts of Syria, saying,

> "With a sense of urgency, I renew my appeal, pleading with all my strength to those responsible, for an immediate ceasefire that can be imposed and respected at least for the time necessary to allow the evacuation of civilians, especially children, who are still trapped under the bloody bombing."

In this Chamber and in other United Nations forums, we continue to debate, while Christians and members of other ethnic and religious minority groups in the Middle East are on the verge of total annihilation. The intentions of the terrorists and extremists groups to banish them from the region have been unmistakably manifest since the start of the barbaric persecution. The Council, which is mandated to maintain international peace and security, is called upon to lead the entire international community's efforts to stop the bloodshed and destruction. Therefore, States supporting terrorist groups must stop the flow of weapons and munitions into the region. Madmen preaching hatred and inciting violence in God's name must be stopped. All States are summoned to do their part in fostering respect for fundamental human rights in the region, including freedom of religion and of expression.

My delegation would like to conclude with a remark made by Pope Francis on the fundamental importance of dialogue:

> "Dialogue is what brings peace. Peace is impossible without dialogue. All of the wars, conflicts and troubles that we encounter with each other are due to a lack of dialogue."

Such dialogue is still possible and must be urgently pursued for the sake of the people of Syria and all inhabitants of the region.

The President (*spoke in Russian*): I call on the representative of Nicaragua.

Mrs. Rubiales de Chamorro (Nicaragua) (*spoke in Spanish*): Nicaragua commends the Russian presidency for its leadership and excellent stewardship of the Security Council this month. We also congratulate the Russian team for the hard work it has carried out in the Council, which is facing major challenges, such as the subject we are addressing today – the situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question.

Nicaragua acknowledges the tireless strength and leadership shown by the Russian Federation in solidarity with the people of the Middle East, and the Russian initiative to convene a meeting in Moscow between the Palestinian and Israeli authorities to promote dialogue and seek a peaceful solution to the conflict. We welcome the initiative, as we believe that only dialogue and negotiation will allow us to find a just and lasting solution. We also welcome the Arab Peace Initiative and other initiatives, such as those of France and Egypt, aimed at putting an end to the suffering of the Palestinian people and at restoring Palestine's right to be a sovereign State, within the 1967 borders, with East Jerusalem as its capital, which would enable the two States – Palestine and Israel – to coexist in peace, harmony and prosperity.

Nicaragua aligns itself with the statement made by the Permanent Representative of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela on behalf of the Movement of Non-Aligned Countries and with the statement to be delivered by the representative of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People. Allow me to quote the words of our President, Commander Daniel Ortega, who spoke about peace and dialogue after the passing of the Israeli leader Mr. Shimon Peres. He said,

> "From peaceful Nicaragua, we greet the people of Israel at this time of the passing of their leader Shimon Peres. We remember him from various occasions and meetings of international organizations, when we were able to appreciate his gifts as a profound statesmen and a man of dialogue. Shimon Peres made his whole life a dream, a personal dream that was not always understood, but a dream that lived on until the end of his days, promoting ideas for a world that required dialogue."

We welcome the initiative of the Palestinian leaders to declare 2017 as the year that will see an end of the Israeli occupation of Palestine. For more than five decades ,we have condemned Israel's illegal occupation and its expansionist policies, which undermine efforts to convene a dialogue aimed at achieving peace, a peace that would greatly benefit the Palestinian people, the Israeli people and the region as a whole. It is crucial to put an end to the occupation immediately through dialogue and negotiation.

In the light of all of Israel's actions, impunity and the ongoing occupation are holding the Council

hostage, impeding a two-State solution through the use and abuse of the veto, and perpetuating the suffering of the Palestinian people in its occupied territories and of the more than 5.5 million Palestinian refugees around the world. The Council has been unable to take action and demand that Israel put an end to the occupation of the Palestinian territory and other occupied Arab territories, that it immediately halt the construction of settlements, that it put an end to the criminal blockade of Gaza and its 2 million inhabitants, and that it release all political prisoners.

At this time, when we must urgently implement the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and achieve the Sustainable Development Goals, Palestine must be able to exercise its right to development and to achieve those Goals. Under occupation, Palestine is not growing and it is not developing. On the contrary, Israel is growing and developing and taking over the natural resources and the export revenue of goods produced in the Palestinian territory, as well as appropriating for itself the customs duties and international assistance and remittances directed to the Palestinian people, adversely impacting the Palestinian economy and, consequently, the well-being and the future of its young people, women and children. We would like to highlight the report of the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development on the impact and economic cost of the occupation, which we hope will be accounted for and restored in its totality.

To conclude, we reiterate that peace in the Middle East means resolving the Palestinian question and the withdrawal of Israel from Lebanon, from the Syrian Golan and from all of the occupied Arab territories. It is also crucial to put an end to foreign interference and intervention in the region, so that we can finally achieve a Middle East of peace and security for both the Arab and Israeli peoples.

The President (*spoke in Russian*): I call on the representative of Kazakhstan.

Mr. Sadykov (Kazakhstan): We thank the Russian presidency for convening today's open debate on the situation in the Middle East. We also thank the Under-Secretary-General, Mr. Stephen O'Brien, and the Special Coordinator, Mr. Nikolay Mladenov, for their briefings and efforts to bring peace to the region.

Kazakhstan attaches great importance to the Middle East region and has consistently pursued a political solution to the Israeli-Palestinian issue. We are seriously concerned about the lack of real progress in resolving the conflict, which impacts regional and international security. In his latest report, entitled "Assistance to the Palestinian People" (A/71/87), the Secretary-General points out the negative trends on the ground, which, according to him, made the two-State solution more distant.

My delegation is particularly concerned about the gravity of the Palestinian situation and calls on the international community to take urgent action to resolve it in order to mitigate the suffering of Palestinians in all aspects of their existence. The blockades in Gaza, along with a beleaguered economy, exacerbate the socioeconomic and humanitarian situation of the Palestinian population, deteriorate relations between the parties and diminish prospects for peace.

The settlement process and its rapid expansion in the occupied territories not only aggravate the conflict but also militate against all peace processes. As the Middle East Quartet's report (S/2016/595, annex) points out, Israel's continued construction of settlements is a serious threat to peace.

We see the two-State solution as the only viable option for a durable peace to be reached by dialogue, in keeping with the Charter of the United Nations and relevant Security Council resolutions. We must avail ourselves of other mechanisms and initiatives at the bilateral and multilateral levels, such as the road map for peace and the Arab Peace Initiative. My delegation urges the Middle East Quartet to pursue its mediation efforts and calls on Israeli and Palestinian leaders to demonstrate political responsibility towards the long-cherished peace. Kazakhstan fully supports international efforts in that regard and recognizes the legitimate right of the Palestinian people to become a full-fledged member of the United Nations. We also recognize Palestine as an independent State.

The situation in Syria requires urgent attention and we hope that the Council finds a viable solution by resuming negotiations, as stipulated in the final communiqué of the Action Group for Syria (S/2012/522, annex) and resolution 2254 (2015). We particularly commend the untiring efforts of the Secretary-General and the United Nations Special Envoy for Syria, Mr. Staffan de Mistura. We call on all parties to put an end to civilian deaths and suffering and to provide access to food, water and health services. Of special importance is allowing much-needed humanitarian aid

into the besieged areas. Neighbouring Lebanon, Jordan and Turkey have opened their borders, are struggling to cope with one of the largest refugee exoduses in recent history, and need international support.

The situation in Yemen continues to deteriorate and the peace talks in Kuwait, ongoing for more than three months, should continue through the good offices of the Secretary-General and the United Nations Special Envoy for Yemen, Ismail Ould Cheikh Ahmed. We welcome the latter's announcement to resume his plan for a comprehensive cessation of hostilities, with the diplomatic engagement of many Member States. It is essential that all parties allow unhindered humanitarian access and ensure the safety of humanitarian personnel. It is critical that all parties adhere to international human rights and international humanitarian law, and take all necessary actions to avoid civilian casualties.

Finally, we reiterate Kazakhstan's commitment to join the multilateral effort to ensure peace in the Middle East.

The President: I now give the floor to Mr. Saikal.

Mr. Saikal: Given the time limitations, I will deliver only part of the statement of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People. The full version will be circulated shortly.

As we meet at the quarterly debate on the question of Palestine, the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People is compelled to sound the alarm on the downward spiral in all aspects of the situation of the Palestinian people under the nearly half-century Israeli military occupation, which is causing so much human suffering, derailing the prospects for a two-State solution and undermining the pursuit for peace. As the humanitarian situation continues to deteriorate — with socioeconomic conditions in the blockaded Gaza Strip, in particular, reaching the lowest point since the Israeli occupation began in 1967 — the continuous building and expansion of illegal settlements has also reached an unprecedented level, effectively confiscating more than 50 per cent of the territory of the State of Palestine, undermining its contiguity and viability.

At last week's Arria Formula meeting, we all heard the briefings of international and Israeli experts describing how settlement construction and expansion is not only a breach of numerous relevant resolutions adopted by the Council and the General Assembly, but also a direct violation of article 49 of the 1949 Geneva Convention relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War and the 2004 International Court of Justice advisory opinions on the construction of a wall in occupied Palestinian territory. We also heard about the massive impact of the Israeli settlement campaign on the Palestinian people's human rights.

Despite repeated international calls for a cessation of all settlement activities, Israel continues to methodically plan, tender and build new settlements, expand existing ones, attempt to legalize settlement outposts, expropriate land and demolish Palestinian homes and other structures in unprecedented numbers, as well as to declare increasing sections of the Palestinian territory to be State land, military zones, national parks and archaeological sites. Israel's systematic policies increasingly deprive Palestinians of their own land with impunity, in violation of international law and in contradiction to its stated commitment to the two-State solution. The settlement enterprise, sustained and enabled by an entire network of bypass roads and infrastructure only for Israeli settlers, is not only impairing the daily lives of Palestinians and violating their rights, but it is fragmenting the Palestinian territory in hundreds of separate, disconnected enclaves, eroding the two-State solution based on the 1967 borders.

As has been amply documented by the United Nations and others — including Israeli organizations — those illegal practices constitute grave violations of the individual and collective inalienable rights of the Palestinian People, particularly their rights to life, freedom and self-determination. The practices also violate the Palestinian people's economic, social and cultural rights, preventing them from exercising sovereignty over their natural resources, and hampering their right to sustainable development.

The Committee underscores the responsibility of States and private entities to not contribute to Israeli violations of Palestinian human rights, particularly as it relates to settlements in the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem, in line with their obligations under international law. In that regard, the Committee encourages Member States to implement Human Rights Council resolution 31/36, of 24 March 2016, requesting the High Commissioner for Human Rights to produce a database of business enterprises involved in the activities of the illegal settlements, in line with the United Nations Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights. The Committee further

welcomes the stance taken by the European Union on the labelling of products manufactured in the settlements.

In several resolutions, the Council itself has described Israel's settlements in the West Bank and East Jerusalem as a serious obstruction to peace, calling on Israel — to no avail — to cease their construction and to dismantle existing settlements. It is now time for the Council to take action, to remove all obstacles to implementing international law and the long-standing parameters for a solution, and to move decisively towards a just and durable solution that will allow the Palestinian State, within the 1967 borders and with East Jerusalem as its capital, to live side by side, in peace and security with Israel. Stressing that the political, physical and socioeconomic division of Gaza and the West Bank is another major obstacle to advancing the prospects for peace, the Committee reiterates today the call on Israel to lift the Gaza blockade.

The international community cannot continue managing this conflict, as in the past: it is clear that the situation is rapidly deteriorating, as indicated by the number of civilian victims of violence, and as reported yesterday by several international human rights organizations at the meeting of the Committee's Working Group. The Committee condemns all forms of violence against civilians, by which Palestinians are disproportionally affected, and calls for action to ensure their protection and accountability, including for unlawful killings, in accordance with international law. The Committee also urges Palestinians to move decisively forward on the path of national reconciliation.

The international community, especially the Council, has to demonstrate strong political will and ingenuity to break this untenable impasse and signal to the world that the United Nations is serious when it talks about peace between Israel and Palestine. The Committee reiterates that an end to the Israeli occupation and the realization of the rights of the Palestinian people, including to self-determination and independence, remain top and unavoidable priorities for the international community and should be pursued with courage and determination.

The President (*spoke in Russian*): I now give the floor to the representative of Argentina.

Mr. García Moritán (Argentina) (*spoke in Spanish*): I would like to begin by congratulating the Russian Federation on having assumed the presidency of the Security Council for October and by thanking it for the invitation to take part in the open debate on a topic that is so important for the international community — the situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question.

Argentina is deeply concerned by the conflicts taking place in the Middle East, which have generated a great humanitarian crisis, the growth of terrorism and the spread of fundamentalist groups. My country favours a solution to the conflict through dialogue and diplomacy; respect for international law and the sovereignty, independence, national unity and territorial integrity of States; the rejection of the acquisition of territory by force and trust in the constructive role and persuasive power of the international community to find paths towards dialogue and progress in negotiations.

Regarding the situation in the Syrian Arab Republic, Argentina is deeply concerned about the humanitarian situation in the country and condemns all acts of violence, in particular against the civilian population. We regret the fact that the Security Council has been unable to reach an agreement to adopt measures with a view to establishing a ceasefire and ensuring access to humanitarian assistance, especially in Aleppo. To that end, Argentina and 69 other Member States have asked the President of the General Assembly to hold a meeting to discuss the item. We anxiously await the informal meeting of the General Assembly to be convened tomorrow.

The situation of Syrian refugees is particularly alarming. In May, the Argentine Republic dispatched a contingent of White Helmets to Lebanon in order to offer their assistance to a refugee camp. Likewise, as President Macri announced at the Summit for Refugees and Migrants on 20 September, Argentina expressed its intention to receive 3,000 Syrian refugees with the financial support, technical assistance and logistical backing of the international community.

Argentina is also deeply concerned by the deadlock in the negotiations between Israel and Palestine. We support a just, comprehensive and lasting peace on the basis of the two-State solution, with the State of Israel and the Palestinian State coexisting side by side in peace and security on the basis of the 1967 borders and other decisiosn reached by the parties in the negotiating process. Likewise, we acknowledge the right of the State of Israel to live in peace alongside its neighbours within safe and internationally recognized borders, as

well as the right of the Palestinian people to establish an independent and viable State recognized by all nations.

My country reiterates its concern over the persistent and ongoing expansion of illegal Israeli settlements in the occupied Palestinian territories, and calls for an end to such expansion. Settlements impede peace and weaken the prospects of two States living in peace and security, and thereby promote the perpetuation of an unsustainable status quo. At the same time, Palestinian leaders must honestly address Israeli security concerns. Hamas and other Palestinian groups must end incitements and attacks against Israeli citizens. Rocket launches from the Gaza Strip against Israel must also stop immediately. My country strongly condemns all terrorist attacks and is therefore convinced that just as there is no military solution to the conflict, no solution can be imposed by terrorist methods.

Argentina reaffirms the special status of Jerusalem, in accordance with the relevant United Nations resolutions, and rejects any unilateral measure to alter that status. My country believes that the holy city must be a peaceful place where people can come together, and that unrestricted access to the holy sites must be ensured for the three main monotheistic religions of Judaism, Christianity and Islam.

Peace is possible only through dialogue and negotiation that respect the parameters acknowledged by the international community, namely, the two-State solution on the basis of relevant United Nations resolutions, the agreements signed between the parties, the Quartet road map, the Arab Peace Imitative, a mutually acceptable solution to the question of Jerusalem, and a just resolution to the refugee question.

On 28 September, we were saddened to learn of the passing of the former President of Israel, Shimon Peres — a statesman who worked tirelessly for a two-State solution that would allow Israel to live in peace with Palestinians and the other countries ofthe region. His commitment was acknowledged when he received the Nobel Peace Prize, along with Yitzhak Rabin and Yasser Arafat. Similarly, Israel and Palestine must work together to build peace, while the international community must not shirk its responsibility to work jointly on a solution to the decades-long conflict.

The President (*spoke in Russian*): I now give the floor to the Representative of Costa Rica.

Mr. Mendoza-García (Costa Rica) (*spoke in Spanish*): We commend the Russian presidency and Mission for the work they are carrying out this month at the helm of the Security Council. We also thank Mr. Nickolay Mladenov, Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, and Stephen O'Brien, Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator, for their briefings.

I will focus my remarks on two conflicts in the Middle East: the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and the situation in Syria. In both cases, the escalation of violence remains alarming and civilians, including women and children, continue to pay a high price, which we firmly condemn.

We also extend our condolences to the Government and the people of Israel for the passing of former Prime Minister Shimon Peres. We will remember him for his role in the negotiations of the Oslo accords, for which he received the Nobel Peace Prize in 1994, along with Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat.

My country reiterates the urgency for the Palestinians and Israelis to resume negotiations on the central pending issues of the conflict, based on prior obligations and agreements previously reached by the parties, supported by international law and the decisions of the Security Council and the General Assembly. It is imperative that a political solution to this conflict be found and that a new peace architecture be created as soon as possible in order to resolve differences and achieve sustainable peace with a view to establishing the basis for direct negotiations that lead to the agreed objective of the international community: the harmonious coexistence between an independent Palestinian State and the State of Israel.

We believe that it is urgent that we succeed in stopping any act that leads to the death of innocents. We also believe in the need to prosecute those responsible and join efforts to stop the spiral of violence and prevent suffering of more civilians.

Costa Rica deeply regrets the way the conflict in Syria is progressing and how the situation is continuing to deteriorate while the Security Council fails to take action to resolve it. It is urgent that we put an end to armed confrontation and seek an early political solution, given the humanitarian crisis the country is experiencing. We very much regret what happened in this Chamber on 8 October, where the draft resolution sponsored by both France and Spain was not adopted,

despite its significant humanitarian component (see S/PV.7785). In that regard, we reiterate the call for the application of the code of conduct promoted by the Accountability, Coherence and Transparency group, to which we belong, so that the permanent members of the Council properly weigh the use of the veto in such situations and that a restriction on its use be implemented.

As indicated by the Secretary-General himself in a recent report to the Council (S/2016/714), the humanitarian crisis threatening Aleppo could become the largest in these years of conflict. Hostilities are characterized by indiscriminate violation of fundamental rules of international humanitarian law, and the worst is that obligations to protect civilians are not being fulfilled.

We regret that the meeting last weekend in Lausanne, Switzerland, convened by Secretary of State John Kerry, did not agree on a common strategy for reaching a peaceful solution and an end to hostilities. The remarks of the Special Envoy for the Syrian crisis, Staffan de Mistura, are particularly troubling. On Monday, 17 October, he said that if we cannot find a solution to such violence before December, the city of Aleppo "will not be there anymore". We welcome the recent announcement of an eight-hour humanitarian pause in Aleppo, which will take place on Thursday, 20 October, and we hope that it will be recurring and extended.

We continue to call on the Security Council to exercise its mandates to maintain international peace and security and to ensure the full application of international justice and the rule of law. In the light of the inaction of the Security Council, we believe it would be appropriate for the General Assembly to be convened in an emergency session to address what is within its jurisdiction. We urge the international community continue its efforts until a new ceasefire is achieved, with the particular aim of ensuring the delivery of humanitarian assistance to Aleppo.

Costa Rica reiterates its concern about the increasing tensions between regional Powers, which are raising tone of the fighting, as it makes a strong call for peace in the Middle East.

The President (*spoke in Russian*): I now give the floor to the representative of Jordan.

Ms. Bahous (Jordan) (*spoke in Arabic*): At the outset, I would like to congratulate my colleague, the Permanent Representative of the Russian Federation, on assuming the presidency of the Security Council this month. I would like to thank the Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process and the Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs, Mr. Stephen O'Brien, for their comprehensive briefings today.

We meet once again in the Council to discuss the situation in the Middle East. The situation is deteriorating, given the crises in the region and the resulting humanitarian tragedies. The failure of the international community to reach a lasting and comprehensive solution to the crises in the region threatens international peace and security more than ever before.

The protection of the region from destruction and violence is an important responsibility of the international community and the Security Council, pursuant to international instruments and resolutions. We have a choice to make — either to work collectively and seriously to ensure peace for future generations or to surrender this world to obscurantist Powers and let them sow division and chaos. The ongoing situation in the Middle East and instability in the region should not prevent us from working effectively to relaunch the peace process, end the Israeli occupation of Palestinian land and find a just and comprehensive solution to the Palestinian question. That is key to ensuring peace in the region.

The absence of a solution to the Palestinian question is at the heart of tensions in the region. The solution to the Palestinian question should ensure the rights of the Palestinian people and allow them to fulfil their aspirations towards establishing their viable and sovereign independent State on Palestinian land within the borders of 4 June 1967, with East Jerusalem as its capital, based on the two-State solution, international resolutions and the Arab Peace Initiative, as the fruit of serious and effective negotiations within a specific time frame.

Such negotiations should preserve the highest national interests of Jordan, especially with regard to the final-status issues, including refugees, water, Jerusalem, borders and security. Accordingly, Jordan reiterates its condemnation of Israel's continued settlement activities in occupied Palestinian territories,

including East Jerusalem, which are dangerously and systematically undermining the two-State solution.

With respect to East Jerusalem, our position is based on the historical Hashemite guardianship of Muslim and Christian holy sites in the city under the supervision of His Majesty the King of Jordan. Pursuant to that guardianship, Jordan will continue to make every effort to protect these holy sites, especially Al-Aqsa Mosque and Al-Haram Al-Sharif. Jordan will continue to counter any Israeli violations. We will work effectively in the international arena to protect Jerusalem and to take every diplomatic and legal measure against any violation that targets these holy sites, which is in line with the historical role of Jordan in Jerusalem, as recognized by the peace treaty between Jordan and Israel.

The recent decision of the Executive Board of UNESCO reflects the international concern over the dangerous violations committed by Israel, the occupying Power, in occupied East Jerusalem, especially against Al-Aqsa Mosque. This decision mirrors the UNESCO Director-General's press statement issued in September 2015. The decision, prepared by Jordan in cooperation with the Palestinians, stresses the importance of the Old City of Jerusalem and its walls for the three revealed religions, but does not address the legal status of East Jerusalem as a city under Israeli military occupation. Nevertheless, Israel, the occupying Power, has a number of obligations that it must fulfil in accordance with international law and international humanitarian law. We would note that the decision uses the correct names of the holy sites, including Al-Aqsa Mosque and its surrounding installations. The decision also provides for Jordanian obligations over the management of Al-Aqsa Mosque, including maintenance and repair and access to the site.

Jordan is concerned by the ongoing Israeli settlement activities, in particular its continued settlement expansions, in violation of international law. To date, Israel has not been compelled to respect the Security Council resolutions condemning its settlement activities in the occupied Palestinian territory. That has undermined the possibility of reaching any peaceful solution, in particular the two-State solution, and has contributed to increased violence in Palestinian territories. If Israel sincerely wishes to achieve peace in the region and live peacefully with its neighbours, it should pay closer attention to the international community's calls for it to change its unilateral and irresponsible policies.

Terrorism today is threatening our present and our future, making us lose sight of our aspirations to peace and security. Terrorist groups have nothing to do with Islam or its noble, humane values. These groups have no identity; they oppose tolerance and moderation and meet mercy with further isolation. How can there be any link between these groups and Islam or any other religion?

Our response should be commensurate with expectations and address the threat of terrorism across the world. We believe that collective efforts are much more important than individual efforts. Therefore, in order to confront violent extremism and terrorism, there should be a collective effort at all levels that is not be based on military solutions alone but should also wage a battle of enlightened ideas against extremist ideologies and hate speech, founded on affection, tolerance and positive values enshrined in our daily lives and in our national and international policies. In that regard, my country rejects violent extremism and terrorism in all their forms, regardless of their motivations. We are committed to implementing all relevant United Nations counter-terrorism resolutions in order to combat these terrorists and to preserve our human values.

Regarding Iraq, Jordan hopes that the fight to liberate Mosul will eliminate theIslamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL), one of the most heinous manifestations of violence and crime against humankind. Jordan hopes that we will be able to achieve this goal as soon as possible so as to spare the suffering people of Mosul, who have already suffered at the hands of ISIL for two years. In this regard, Jordan stresses the need to stabilize the city while preserving the lives of civilians and ensuring their protection.

The Syrian crisis is now entering its sixth year. We are witnessing increasing violence around Syria, especially in Aleppo. Jordan stresses its position on the need to reach a political solution that ensures the safety and territorial integrity of Syria, with the participation of all factions of the Syrian people, provides an environment conducive to the return of its people, meets the aspirations of Syrians and ends violence, extremism and terrorism in Syria. We must implement Security Council resolutions on the matter, including resolution 2254 (2015), and to launch a serious political process leading to a political solution based on the statements of

the International Syria Support Group and the Geneva communiqué (S/2012/523, annex).

All Syrian parties should commit to resolution 2268 (2016), which endorses the cessation of hostilities in Syria, and resolution 2258 (2015), which calls for the delivery of humanitarian assistance in Syria. The crisis of Syrian refugees is an urgent global issue. The international community must alleviate this crisis, which is one of the most disastrous humanitarian tragedies of our times. Jordan is hosting more than 1.4 million Syrian refugees, who represent 21 per cent of its people. Our capacities have been strained due by the cost of hosting these refugees, which has had disastrous effects on host communities and infrastructure.

The President (*spoke in Russian*): I give the floor to Ms. Adamson.

Ms. Adamson: The candidate countries Montenegro, Serbia and Albania; the country of the Stabilisation and Association Process and potential candidate Bosnia and Herzegovina; the European Free Trade Association country Liechtenstein, member of the European Economic Area; and Ukraine align themselves with this statement.

The following remarks are focused on the Middle East peace process. The European Union (EU) position on Syria will be outlined during the forthcoming informal meeting of the General Assembly.

Before the Council in July (see S/PV.7736), the European Union expressed concern at the trends on the ground that threaten the viability of the two-State solution. Parties were called upon to swiftly engage with the Quartet and other relevant stakeholders, implement the Quartet's recommendations in full and reverse negative trends. Regrettably, we have instead seen an acceleration of negative trends, in direct contradiction with Quartet recommendations and Foreign Affairs Council conclusions. The risk is to entrench a one-State reality of perpetual occupation and conflict that is incompatible with realizing the national aspirations of both peoples.

For the European Union, there is no alternative to a negotiated two-State solution, based on parameters set out in European Council conclusions of December 2009 and July 2014, that meets Israeli and Palestinian security needs and Palestinian aspirations to statehood and sovereignty, ends the occupation that began in 1967, and resolves all permanent status issues in order to end the conflict. It remains the only realistic way of ending the conflict once and for all.

Since early 2016, and particularly since the publication of the Quartet report (S/2016/595, annex), there has been an acceleration of Israeli settlement expansion. Settlements are illegal under international law. On 28 September, Israel announced plans to construct 98 new housing units in what is effectively a new settlement near the existing one of Shiloh, which drew wide condemnation from the international community. This cuts deeply into the West Bank and further increases risks to the contiguity of a future Palestinian State.

Other related policies threaten notably the socioeconomic viability of Area C for the Palestinian population. As clearly illustrated by the data provided by the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, Israeli demolitions of Palestinian structures — including some funded by the European Union and European Union member States — have vastly increased in 2016, not least recently.

Such settlement and planning policies constitute an obstacle to peace. A fundamental change of policy by Israel with regard to the occupied Palestinian territory, particularly in Area C, is necessary to prevent the irreversible loss of the two-State solution. It will significantly increase economic opportunities, empower Palestinian institutions and enhance stability and security for Israelis and Palestinians alike.

We continue to be deeply concerned by the continuing cycle of violence and killings, most recently on 9 October in Jerusalem. The European Union unequivocally condemns acts of terror and extends its deepest condolences to the families of the victims. We urge all parties to work towards the de-escalation of tensions, observe international humanitarian law, and adhere to the principles of necessity and proportionality in the use of force. Palestinian leaders are again urged to consistently and clearly condemn terror attacks and take all steps within their capacity to end incitement. Violence not only brings personal tragedy, but also makes any peace process infinitely more difficult.

Let me now turn to the situation in Gaza, an important topic of today's meeting. Militant activity and the dire humanitarian situation in Gaza feed general instability and constitute a recipe for renewed conflict. What hopes can Palestinian youth in Gaza have for their future in current circumstances? While all international

donors should swiftly honour their pledges made at the Cairo Conference, Gaza's humanitarian needs can be properly addressed only through political progress on the following three tracks:

First, all sides must respect the cease-fire. All indiscriminate attacks are illegal and unacceptable and increase risks of escalation. Such activities threaten the lives of civilians, divert resources from humanitarian efforts and impede reconstruction and development. The illicit arms build-up by Hamas and other militant groups must stop.

Secondly, the European Union urges all Palestinian factions to engage in good faith in the reconciliation process on the basis of the Palestine Liberation Organization platform and Quartet principles. A single, legitimate and democratic Palestinian Authority, with full control over Gaza, is critical for fulfilling the national aspirations of the Palestinian people and for achieving a viable Palestinian State. In this context, the European Union encourages the prompt setting of a new date for the planned Palestinian local elections, which, if held in line with international standards, could provide an important renewal of Palestinian democracy and a first step towards advancing national unity.

Finally, we reiterate our call on Israel for an end of the closure and a full opening of the crossings, while addressing legitimate security concerns. The lifting of restrictions on the movement of people, including representatives of the international community, services and goods — particularly those designated as dual-use items — is needed to allow reconstruction, service delivery and international infrastructure projects. The EU urges both parties to promote confidence- and trust-building measures. In that regard, the EU commends the signing of the Israeli-Palestinian electricity agreement on 13 September. The EU reiterates its readiness to provide its full support to resolve the situation.

In these challenging times for the peace process, the EU believes that regional partners can play a key role in changing the dynamics on the ground, not least through discussion based on the Arab Peace Initiative, which provides key elements for a comprehensive settlement. Their engagement and progress in the peace process represent an opportunity and could unlock new forms of cooperation benefitting the whole region.

Recalling French efforts and the communiqué adopted at the ministerial meeting in Paris on 3 June, as well as conclusions adopted by the Foreign Affairs Council on 20 June, the EU is determined to continue to work in close coordination with the parties, Quartet partners and all other relevant stakeholders towards a two-State solution that would end the occupation that began in 1967 and resolve all permanent status issues.

I will end by thanking the Secretary-General and his Special Coordinator for their ceaseless efforts.

The President (*spoke in Russian*): I give the floor to the representative of Guatemala.

Mr. Skinner-Klée (Guatemala) (*spoke in Spanish*): My delegation thanks the Russian Federation, as the President of the Security Council, for convening this open debate.

My delegation aligns itself with the statement made on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement.

Although the Council has discussed the situation in the Middle East on many occasions, this open debate is timely, given the critical situation affecting the region. Indeed, indiscriminate military offensives, whether in Aleppo or Yemen, or recently in Mosul, have victimized civilians in a barbaric manner, violating the most basic human right to life. It is unacceptable that civilians have not been spared the indiscriminate attacks of armed forces that further threaten international peace and security.

The abject violence sadly reminds us that Iraq is one of the countries with the largest displaced populations in the world, with almost 3.5 million people who have fled their communities because of indiscriminate violence. At the same time, the terrible situation in the Syrian Arab Republic has highlighted the heart-wrenching reality faced by its civilian population. That tragic situation is largely due to inaction on the part of the Council. In Aleppo, alone, about 275,000 people are trapped in the crossfire between the Syrian army and its allies and opposition groups, while the international community is shocked to see the Council incapable of reaching the minimum consensus, thereby becoming an ineffective and nearly irrelevant body.

Guatemala regrets the lack of access for humanitarian aid and calls on the forces on the ground not to violate international humanitarian law and to facilitate the affected populations' access to humanitarian aid. Furthermore, Guatemala joins the UNICEF strong condemnation of the heinous attack on a primary school in the city of Dara'a, Syria. Most shameful of all, regarding the maelstrom of violence, is

the fact that the purposes and principles of the Charter of the United Nations, whose essential mandate is the maintenance of international peace and security, are being rendered null and void by the Council's failure to meet its Charter-mandated responsibilities, thereby transforming the tenets of the Charter into mere rhetoric in the absence of substantive action. Equally unacceptable are the scale and size of the indiscriminate bombing, including the use of prohibited weapons, in densely populated areas. Furthermore, it is regrettable to see the Council's inaction lead to an increase in unspeakable violence.

Guatemala supports the efforts made to date by the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for Syria, Mr. Staffan de Mistura. We agree with the Special Envoy that we must exert all possible pressure to achieve a cessation of violence and, at the very least, regular cessations of hostilities to ensure the access of the civilian population to humanitarian aid. We consider the unilateral ceasefire to be an important first step and hope that such action will continue, not only in Aleppo, but throughout Syrian territory. A ceasefire is crucial to implementing a humanitarian pause in the area. Guatemala regrets the fact that no agreement was reached at the recent discussions between the Ministers for Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation and the United States of America, in Lausanne, Switzerland. We therefore urge the parties to do their utmost to pursue dialogue.

Equally critical is the question of Israel and Palestine, not only due to the complex history and the convergence of religions. We share the concern expressed by the Secretary-General about the decision of the Israeli authorities to build 98 dwellings as part of a new settlement, and the establishment of an industrial complex west of Ramallah, both in the occupied Palestinian territory in the West Bank. As we have said here before, walls, checkpoints, violent responses by security forces, the demolition of homes, restrictions on non-governmental organizations, violent attacks by individuals and groups, as well as rocket launches and disproportionate responses, all impede a solution to the conflict. Furthermore, we reiterate that the building of settlements is illegal, fuels the conflict, flouts the recommendations of the Quartet for Middle East peace and violates international law. All such actions have become a clear obstacle to the achievement of a two-State solution, with both States living peacefully side by side.

To conclude, Guatemala urges the parties to continue the dialogue aimed at stabilizing the region, ensuring respect for human rights and, in particular, reducing violence towards civilians in the Middle East. We appeal yet again to each and every member of the Council to comply with their responsibilities under the Charter of the United Nations.

The President (*spoke in Russian*): I give the floor to the representative of South Africa.

Mr. Zaayman (South Africa): We join other Member States in expressing our appreciation to the Russian Federation for convening this open debate on the situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question. We trust that the debate will assist in mobilizing the international community, in particular the Security Council, to support the Palestinians and the Israelis in finding a lasting solution to the conflict.

My delegation aligns itself with the statement delivered earlier by the representative of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement.

A few weeks ago, President Jacob Zuma addressed the General Assembly during its general debate (see A/71/PV.9). He expressed South Africa's concern over the lack of progress in finding a durable solution to the Palestinian question and stressed the importance of the United Nations in carrying out its historic mission of ensuring that the issue is resolved once and for all.

The Palestinian people have lived under Israeli occupation for almost half a century. The occupation remains untenable and threatens the two-State solution. The West Bank continues to experience heightened tension and sporadic acts of violence between Palestinians and Israelis, as we have seen in Jerusalem and Hebron recently. Illegal Israeli settlements continue unabated and have led to a fragmentation of the West Bank and continue to threaten the feasibility of a contiguous Palestinian State. The illegal blockade of Gaza has led to a dire humanitarian situation, which is both unacceptable and unsustainable. The Israeli occupation not only violates the collective and individual rights of the Palestinians, but also poses a threat to the security and very existence of Israel.

South Africa reaffirms that the central responsibility for attaining peace is primarily in the hands of the Palestinians and the Israelis themselves. We, as part of the international community, should support and

encourage the parties towards that endeavour. In that regard, dialogue and negotiation remain the only way forward to finding a lasting solution. The guidelines for those negotiations have to be based on the established international legal framework, which includes General Assembly and Security Council resolutions, the Madrid principles, the Arab Peace Initiative and the Quartet road map, to name but a few.

The Security Council must live up to its Charter obligations and play a more active role in resolving the conflict. Meetings of the Security Council like this open debate are important, but they need to be followed up with meaningful, concrete action, as the Council does in other cases on its agenda. In other cases, the Council has asserted the moral and legal weight of the United Nations and coerced action by the parties through threats and action under Chapter VII of the Charter.Surprisingly, in the case of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, responsibility for facilitating the peace process has been deferred to the Quartet with questionable results. My delegation has long held the view that there should be a broader international framework to assist the parties towards a negotiated settlement and in which the United Nations assumes the role of neutral arbiter.

In this context, we welcome the French initiative. The common message flowing from the participants at the Paris conference is that the time has come for the parties to resume negotiations with the full support of the international community, based on the existing international legal framework, and to work towards a two-State solution. South Africa recently co-hosted, in partnership with the United Nations, an international media seminar on peace in the Middle East. This seminar was held for the first time in sub-Saharan Africa and helped to heighten awareness of the situation in Palestine, we believe, in a balanced and objective manner. It also provided an opportunity for civil society and the media to contribute towards an atmosphere conducive to dialogue.

In conclusion, we wish to reiterate that the situation on the ground cannot be allowed to continue unchanged as it will continue to be an impediment to the peace, security, stability and development of the wider Middle East region. In our view, ending the occupation is in the interest of Israel and Palestine alike, and we would encourage all Member States to direct the parties towards attaining a lasting solution to the conflict.

The President (*spoke in Russian*): I now give the floor to the representative of Turkey.

Mr. Begeç (Turkey): As we approach the fiftieth year of the occupation of the Palestinian territories, prospects for a lasting peace are fading away. The revitalization of the peace process is not only necessary to grant a dignified life to the Palestinian people, but also a fundamental requirement to achieving stability in the region. In this regard, we support initiatives that would address the long-standing vacuum on the political track.

However, the continuing occupation and Israel's practices in contravention of international law, particularly the systematic expansion of settlements, erode the viability of a two-State solution. In addition, house demolitions, land confiscation, administrative detentions, denying Palestinians' right to development, as well as efforts to undermine the status and sanctity of Al-Haram Al-Sharif breed desperation and anger among the Palestinians, who have being collectively punished for decades. These facts, particularly the concerns regarding the settlements, were underlined by all the Council members during the Arria Formula meeting on 14 October. Their words must be backed by action.

The international community can no longer afford to turn a blind eye to this historical injustice. Inaction not only aggravates the daily suffering of the Palestinians, but creates deplorable consequences for the region and beyond, as it fuels radicalization. In order to overcome the current impasse, the Palestinians should be able to sit at the negotiating table as the State of Palestine, with equal standing with Israel. In this regard, the recognition of the State of Palestine by more countries and its full integration into international forums are vital.

To reach a lasting peace, it is also crucial for Palestinians to voice their legitimate demands in unity. In this regard, Turkey will continue to encourage the reconciliation of the Palestinian groups. Empowering the Palestinian people and improving their living conditions through development assistance and investments is more urgent than ever. In that understanding, Turkey's $200-million pledge for the period of 2014-2017 is channelled into various projects. In the past two years, we have provided a total of $100-million worth of aid.

The agreement on the normalization of Turkish-Israeli relations, which was concluded in June, enabled

us to restore our bilateral relations in many fields and further increase our assistance to the occupied territories, particularly Gaza. The first Turkish shipment of 11,000 tons of humanitarian aid reached Gaza on 4 July through Ashdod port, and a second shipment arrived on 7 September. In addition, the Turkey-Palestine Friendship Hospital built in Gaza, with a 200-bed capacity, will be operational soon. The construction project for 320 housing units in Gaza for Palestinian families will be completed by the end of 2017.

Turkey will contribute to efforts for a just and lasting settlement of the Palestinian issue with the establishment of a sovereign and independent Palestinian State within the pre-1967 borders, with East Jerusalem as its capital.

The ongoing catastrophe in Syria continues to unravel the very principles the Charter of the United Nations. The regime and its supporters are reducing Aleppo to rubble. The inhabitants of eastern Aleppo are faced with unprecedented cruelty under indiscriminate air strikes and shelling. The brutal scenario is well known — besiege the city, starve the people and force them into submission. Impunity for these war crimes and crimes against humanity only encourage the regime to go further. The perpetrators of these horrific acts, including the use of chemical weapons, must be held accountable.

Aleppo is the latest test for the international community. Failure will mean further death, displacement, despair and the rise of radicalization. Failure will mean the end of the multicultural Syria as we know it. In this regard, initiatives, such as the 11 October joint letter on Aleppo, sponsored by 62 countries, as well as the informal meeting of the General Assembly to be organized upon the request of 70 countries tomorrow, are promising steps. They should be supported by concrete actions on the part of the overall membership and the Security Council in order to make a difference on the ground.

After six years of brutality and crime, the Syrian people are looking to us, the international community. They want to see our commitment to bringing peace to their country. We need to feel the weight of this expectation every single day and strive to deliver it. This is our collective responsibility.

The President (*spoke in Russian*): I now give the floor to the representative of Namibia.

Mr. Diamonds (Namibia): I wish to congratulate you, Mr. President, on your country's assumption of the presidency of the Security Council for the month of October. I thank you, Sir, most sincerely for organizing this debate on the important topic of the situation in the Middle East, in particular in Palestine. I would also like to take this opportunity to thank the Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process and the Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator for their comprehensive briefings this morning.

Furthermore, my delegation aligns itself with the statement delivered by the representative of Venezuela on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement.

The Security Council has recently heard about the increasingly dire situation in the Middle East, especially about the occupation of the Palestinian territories. The situation in Syria causes general apprehension that, owing to the ongoing fighting, the humanitarian needs in Aleppo and other parts of Syria are devastating. The situation in Yemen grows more difficult by the day and it is becoming increasingly impossible to keep track of who is attacking whom. Furthermore, a major attack against the Islamic State in Iraq and the Sham in Mosul, in northern Iraq, is under way and analysts are raising serious concerns regarding the consequences for the region.

Last week, at the Arria Formula meeting called by some members of the Security Council, we heard that the situation in Palestine is worsening, as the Israeli Government insists on continuing its settlement programmes. There is no way to sugar-coat the realities of apartheid, as practiced by the Israeli Government.

We commend the French Government for its initiative aimed at mobilizing international support for Palestinian-Israeli peace and for convening the Israel peace conference. We commend and encourage the efforts by Egypt, the Russian Federation and the Quartet in moving forward with the peace efforts. Namibia also hopes that the renewed efforts in the Arab Peace Initiative will yield positive results. That vision of hope drives activities, such as the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People, on 26 November, and the declaration of 2017 as the International Year of Solidarity with the Palestinian People.

In the face of a truly dire conflict situation in the Middle East,we call on Israel to reassess its aggressive stance towards the Palestinians to end their

ongoing punitive destruction of Palestinian homes and infrastructure and to seize their illegal construction of settlements on the occupied territory. Namibia is concerned about the ongoing reports about Palestinian security detainees and prisoners, including children held in Israeli prisons. We are equally concerned that the Israeli Parliament, on 3 August 2016, approved the youth bill allowing the Israeli authorities to imprison Palestinian children as young as 12 years of age if convicted of terrorism against Israeli civilians or military personnel. Reports of the widespread and systematic torture of Palestinian detainees by the security services in the occupied West Bank are also an issue of concern.

Namibia therefore calls for Israel's complete and unconditional withdrawal from the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem. We urge the international community to facilitate the creation of a Palestinian State based on the 1967 borders. We also call on both sides to work for the restoration of calm and to return to the table of negotiation and dialogue with a view to achieving a two-State solution.

In the same vein, Namibia continues to support the people of Palestine in their quest to achieve their inalienable right to self-determination, justice, freedom and independence. Namibia stands with the people of Palestine in their determined efforts in pursuit of these principles through political, diplomatic and non-violent means. We further look forward to the end of this occupation of close to 50 years and to seeing the Palestinian people exercising their inalienable rights to self-determination and their quest for nationhood.

In conclusion, the one-State solution that Israel is seeking to impose on the international community is a road map that will lead to nowhere. We hope that Israel will soon wake up to this realization.

The President (*spoke in Russian*): I now give the floor to the representative of Qatar.

Ms. Al-Thani (Qatar) (*spoke in Arabic*): I wish at the outset to congratulate you, Sir, on your assumption of the presidency of the Security Council and to thank you for having convened this meeting. We also thank Mr. Mladenov, Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, and Mr. Stephen O'Brien, Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs, for their briefings this morning.

The increasing variety of challenges that the world is witnessing requires that efforts be made that are commensurate with their scope and their impact on international peace and security. It seems that the lessons learned in the context of international efforts to deal with conflicts and crises have been insufficient, and we are now paying the price for the spread of these challenges, which include terrorism.

The continued consideration by the Security Council for many years of the situation in the Middle East reaffirms this. We welcome the holding of regular meetings by the Security Council on the situation on the Middle East; however, we believe that achieving peace in the region is dependent on respect by the parties for the provisions of international law and requires refraining from actions that are catastrophic for international peace and security.

The international community has agreed on the basic criteria for resolving the crisis in the Middle East. The realization of peace in the region requires the defeat of terrorism in a context of international legitimacy and the implementation of all peace initiatives. That means that there is no alternative to the establishment of a Palestinian State living side by side with Israel in peace and security on the basis of the June 1967 borders, with East Jerusalem as its capital, in line with the relevant Security Council resolutions, particularly resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973) and the Arab Peace Initiative. This requires that an end be put to the Israeli occupation of all occupied Arab territories and to all settlement activities, the lifting of the siege of Gaza, protection for the Palestinian people, the return of refugees and the realization of the inalienable right of the Palestinian people to self-determination.

The success of any peace initiative will require Israel to desist from its policy of imposing a fait accompli on the occupied territories, in violation of international law. Such actions by Israel are all null and void and will not lead to a comprehensive peace in the Middle East. In addition, addressing the dire humanitarian situation in Gaza will have a positive impact on peace efforts.

When we speak of the situation in the Middle East, we cannot ignore the current situation in Syria, which represents the greatest challenge to the international community. The repeated failures to put an immediate end to the Syrian crisis will lead only to the continuation of flagrant violations of international law and to instability in the Middle East, thus affecting Syria's

territorial integrity and the unity of its people as well as the security and stability of the region and the world.

However, the efforts made by the international community and the International Syria Support Group, as well as the adoption by the Security Council of resolution 2268 (2016), have not had the desired effect. The Syrian regime continues to violate international law, targets civilians, uses weapons with indiscriminate effects and commits massacres in all areas. It exploits divisions in the Security Council and continues its violation of international humanitarian law against civilians in Syria, in total disregard of their impact on the region and the world, using the United Nations and other forums to change the facts on the ground and manipulate the situation, as it has done recently in Aleppo.

This humanitarian disaster has seemingly not been enough for the Syrian regime to change its policies. The Syrian people have become fodder for war in the absence of an international consensus. We are aware of the seriousness of the challenges facing the Security Council with regard to the Syrian crisis and of how they prevent the Council from taking immediate measures to put an end to the violations and massacres being committed in Syria. The Security Council is required, today more than ever, to immediately step in to protect civilians in Aleppo and other parts of Syria.

The only way to guarantee an end to the violence is through the implementation of resolution 2254 (2015). The only solution to the crisis is a Syrian-led comprehensive and inclusive political process that would enable the legitimate aspirations of the Syrian people to be realized, implement in full the Geneva communiqué (S/2012/522, annex) and lead to a peaceful transfer of power and the release of all detainees and prisoners, as well as allow international assistance to reach all those in need.

We will continue our efforts, along with the rest of the international community, to ensure the realization of the legitimate aspirations of the Syrian people in accordance with international law and the Charter of the United Nations.

The President (*spoke in Russian*): I now give the floor to the representative of Kuwait.

Mr. Alotaibi (Kuwait): I have the honour to deliver this statement on behalf of the States members of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC). I would like also to express my sincere congratulations to you, Sir, for assuming the presidency of the Security Council for the month of October. I wish you every success and express my thanks to you for having convened this open debate on the situation in the Middle East, including the question of Palestine.

After almost 50 years of the Israeli occupation, the deadlocked political horizon and the fact that the peace process is at an impasse continue to present a serious challenge to the international community owing to the intransigence of Israel, the occupying Power, and its disrespect of the will of the international community and international resolutions.

At every juncture, Israel has rejected and obstructed international and regional peace efforts that have been based firmly in international law and United Nations resolutions. Instead, it has sought to justify its illegal behaviour with empty, distorted pretexts and has persisted with such illegal behaviour on the ground, causing deep suffering to the Palestinian people under its occupation and further entrenching its illegal occupation.

Among the primary methods by which Israel has pursued its illegal agenda in the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem, has been its building and expansion of colonial settlements and the transfer of its own civilians to the occupied land, in grave breach of international humanitarian law. It should be emphasized that Israel's settlement practices, which involve the illegal confiscation of Palestinian property, the demolition of Palestinian homes and the forced eviction and displacement of Palestinian civilians, unmistakably underpin a policy of colonization and ethnic cleansing and constitute blatant violations of the inalienable and national rights of the Palestinian people.

Recent figures reveal that the socioeconomic and humanitarian situation of the Palestinian population in the Gaza Strip in particular, where Israel for nearly 10 years imposed an illegal blockade, is the worst it has ever been since 1967, when the occupation began. At the same time, other unlawful Israeli practices, such as the ongoing arrest, detention and abuse and captivity of Palestinian civilians, including children, and military raids in which Palestinians are killed, injured or extra-judicially executed, have become a pattern of daily life in Palestine, which constitutes a vicious and destructive cycle, with both short and long-term consequences on

the occupied population, as well as on the prospects for peace and stability.

It is clear and should be of extreme concern to the international community, including the Security Council, that Israel's persistent pursuit of such aggressive policies not only undermines international efforts to ensure peace and security and the vision of the two-State solution, based on 1967 borders, but also constitutes flagrant breaches of international law and international humanitarian law, the Fourth Geneva Convention of 1949 and the relevant resolutions of the Council. That lack of accountability undermines international law, the credibility of the Security Council and the international system as a whole. In that regard, the OIC underlines the urgency of the Security Council assuming its Charter-mandated role and taking the necessary measures to end the deteriorating situation.

A clear and unequivocal draft resolution should be adopted to address Israel's violation of the law, including its settlement policy, the demands for a halt to the illegal colonization campaign and an end to Israel's prolonged occupation. Such a draft resolution will constitute a meaningful contribution to, and real support for, the ongoing international efforts aimed at preserving and attaining the two-State solution, on the basis of the relevant United Nations resolutions, the Madrid land-for-peace principle and the Arab Peace Initiative, which sets forth a clear and just path for peace.

In that regard, the OIC reiterates its support for the French initiative to restore a political horizon under international, multilateral patronage and within a specified time frame, with a view to ending the Israeli occupation and achieving a just, comprehensive, lasting and peaceful solution, which has been obstructed and delayed for far too long. Fifty years of occupation, oppression, humiliation and the worst kind of human rights violations is enough, and it is morally, legally and politically unacceptable to allow that to continue.

The OIC warns against the repeated provocations and attacks by extremist Jewish groups on worshippers at Islamic and Christian holy sites, namely, at the Al-Aqsa Mosque and a number of churches in Jerusalem. The dangerous consequences of such extremist action could be far-reaching and grave and must be averted. Israel's illegal practices and measures are aimed at falsifying the history of the occupied city of Jerusalem, obliterating its Palestinian Arab identity and attempting to alter its indigenous, demographic composition. The expansion of colonial settlements and the expulsion of Palestinian citizens must end. In parallel, we must caution against the grave impact of the actions of Israel's terrorist settler groups, including "price-tag" and "hill-top youth" militias, which continue their incitement and terrorist attacks against Palestinian civilians — all with the support and protection of the Israeli occupation forces.

Such Israeli practices have created a tragic situation that calls for serious action by the Council to stop the ongoing violations, as they nurture extremism, violence and racism and further destabilize an already fragile situation. Such action also further fuels religious conflict, which endangers regional and international peace and security. It should be stressed that the right to security is not exclusive to Israel; security is a right that should be provided to, and enjoyed by, all nations, especially the victims of occupation. We call on the Council to assume its responsibility and provide the Palestinian people with international protection in accordance with international humanitarian law. In line with the duty conferred upon it by the Charter of the United Nations to maintain international peace and security, the Council must also act to safeguard the prospects for peace and chart a way forward to finally and justly resolve the question of Palestine, after all of these decades, and contribute to the establishment of lasting peace and security in the Middle East region.

A just peace would be one through which the Palestinian people recover their inalienable rights, including their right to return, self-determination and independence in the State of Palestine on Palestinian territory occupied since 1967, with East Jerusalem as its capital, and would include reaching a just solution to the Palestinian refugee issue, in consonance with the relevant United Nations resolutions.

The President (*spoke in Russian*): I now give the floor to the representative of Bangladesh.

Mr. Momen (Bangladesh): We convey our appreciation to the Russian presidency for having convened today's open debate.

My delegation aligns itself with the statements made, respectively, by the representative of Venezuela on behalf of the Movement of Non-Aligned Countries and by the representative of the State of Kuwait on behalf of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation.

The open debates in the Council Chamber on the Palestinian question reverberate with a deepening sense of frustration, given the Council's persistent failure and inability to live up to its obligations to end the nearly five decades'-long Israeli occupation of the Palestinian territories, and thus pave the way for a peaceful, just and durable solution to the crisis.

We agree with most delegations that the immediate priority for the Council is to send out an unqualified message condemning the illegal Israeli settlements, including the recent expansion plans. Such plans have emerged as the symbol of the protracted illegal occupation and have been identified as the main obstacle to pursuing the final status negotiations, and thereby a viable two-State solution.

We cannot agree more with the Ambassador and Permanent Observer of the State of Palestine when he underscored the need for restoring the "political horizon" in order for the Council to act in a decisive manner on this seminal issue of concern, and doing so while drawing on its own resolutions, the Quartet road map, the Arab Peace Initiative and the Madrid land-for-peace principle. We urge that the Palestinian delegation's current initiative to hold dialogues with all Council members on the possibility of a Council draft resolution to address the illegality of the Israeli settlement regime, including the construction of the wall in the occupied Palestinian territory, lead to its much-anticipated and logical conclusion.

The Arria Formula meeting held last week was unequivocal about how the illegal Israeli settlements continue to undermine the prospects for reviving the Middle East peace process. They deserve to be accounted for pursuant to the provisions of the Fourth Geneva Convention and the Rome Statute. The international conference held in Geneva in June, the French initiative and the Quartet report issued in July (S/2016/595, annex) also sounded unmistakable concerns about continued Israeli settlement activities, which have potentially irreversible implications for the character, status and demography of the occupied Palestinian territories.

The dire humanitarian and socioeconomic situation — particularly in the Gaza Strip, which is under an Israeli blockade that is entering its tenth year — was eloquently highlighted by the briefers this morning. We call upon the international community to impress upon Israel, the occupying Power, to put an end to its systematic violation of international humanitarian law and human rights principles and its unjustified acts of collective punishment unleashed on the 2 million people in Gaza.

It is perhaps an irony that the Palestinian authorities are often called upon to take action against incitement of so-called terrorist acts, when the most fundamental root causes of the generational challenges of terrorism and radicalization sweeping through our world have been left unaddressed for decades. At the risk of its own peril, the international community must do something besides ignoring that stark truth. To that effect, my delegation would support the proposal to mark the fiftieth year of the unlawful Israeli occupation of the Palestinian territories by declaring 2017 as the international year to end the occupation.

We appreciate the Palestinian delegation's interest in playing an enhanced role in the United Nations within stipulated rules and procedures. We pledge them our continued support in realizing their unalienable right to self-determination and independent and viable statehood.

The President (*spoke in Russian*): I now give the floor to the representative of Sri Lanka.

Mr. Perera (Sri Lanka): Let me join the other speakers in commending the President for convening this timely and important debate.

Sri Lanka associates itself with the statement made by the representative of Venezuela on behalf of the Movement of Non-Aligned Countries. I wish to make this statement in my national capacity.

Conflicts in Syria and Yemen, an unprecedented refugee crisis and a humanitarian situation of epic proportions in various areas — including the the surge in violent extremism and terrorism — have contributed to the growing instability across the Middle East. The unabated shelling and airstrikes, such as in Aleppo, have caused untold suffering, and the images of little children caught in the crossfire are more than humankind should have to bear. Sri Lanka calls upon the parties concerned to find a peace deal in Syria without delay. Sri Lanka welcomes the plenary meeting of the General Assembly to be held tomorrow on the situation in Syria. We are deeply conscious of the dire need on the part of the international community to address the overwhelming humanitarian needs of Syrians and to halt all attacks against civilian targets.

In that context, the question of Palestine takes on additional importance. Sri Lanka reaffirms its steadfast support of the Palestinian cause. This debate reminds us once again of the urgency of finding a just solution to the question of Palestine and addressing the plight of Palestinian people. The world must not forget the dire humanitarian situation in the occupied Palestinian territories — especially in Gaza, were the conditions are intolerable — especially at this time of unprecedented unrest in the Middle East, when we are focused on the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant and the demanding refugee crisis in Syria.

Sri Lanka supports the work of United Nations agencies in occupied Palestinian territories, including the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East and the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, which keep the majority of people in Gaza supplied with the bare necessities, including education.

As Chair of the Special Committee to Investigate Israeli Practices Affecting the Human Rights of the Palestinian People and Other Arabs of the Occupied Territories, Sri Lanka is particularly concerned about the escalating violence and the number of civilian casualties, which include infants.

The international community has repeatedly called for a freeze to Israel's settlement activities. Both parties to the conflict must create the necessary environment to facilitate peace. There is an urgent need for mutual confidence-building measures in support of efforts to resume dialogue and substantive negotiations. Israel must protect the Palestinian civilian population in the occupied territories and desist from actions that run contrary to the established rules of international law and practice.

We recognize the security needs of Israel. Indiscriminate attacks against Israeli civilians will lead to a counterproductive cycle of violence. We urge both parties to respect international humanitarian law and exercise the utmost restraint for the sake of the safety of civilians.

It is important to stay engaged in finding a just and durable solution to the situation in the Middle East. Sri Lanka supports the implementation of the General Assembly resolution regarding the inalienable rights of the Palestinian to statehood.

We are encouraged that, in spite of decades of disappointment, the people of Palestine have resolutely sustained their spirit and strength of purpose to gain their legitimate rights. They have prevailed over the considerable challenges facing them. We hope that the Palestinian people will work together to preserve national unity, which is imperative for the creation of a fully sovereign, independent Palestine.

The President (*spoke in Russian*): I now give the floor to the representative of Iceland.

Mr. Gunnarsson (Iceland): Allow me to thank the Russian President of the Security Council for organizing this quarterly debate on the situation in the Middle East, which includes the question of Palestine.

The region of the Middle East faces massive challenges amid conflict and crisis. The epicentres of conflict — Syria, Yemen, Libya — have a severe impact on their neighbouring countries. The fallout from the conflicts attests to the staggering cost that the whole world incurs when there is a failure in conflict prevention and conflict resolution. Of course, the costs are most brutal for the civilians living in the zones of conflict. The continued targeting of civilians and civilians infrastructure, particularly medical facilities, is completely unacceptable. Impunity must not be allowed to stand.

Yet there is one conflict in the region that should be amenable to resolution — where preventing further conflict should be possible. Indeed, the outline of a viable peace plan has been on the table for years. The two-State solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is the only viable peace plan that will allow both nations to live side by side in peace. Yet at times both parties to the conflict seem hell-bent on tearing the plan up.

Of great concern is the Israeli Government's continuing settlement policy. At the Arria Formula meeting on settlements last week, we again heard convincing evidence that Israeli Government policy has had the effect — intended or not — of making it impossible for a contiguous Palestinian State to emerge. Settlement expansion and the destruction of Palestinian structures undermine the basis for peace. We would encourage Palestinian leaders to do everything in their power to reduce tension and avoid provocation. Violent acts against Israeli citizens and the firing of rockets into Israel are totally unacceptable. We urge Palestinian leaders to work to unite the people of Palestine under a

democratic Government. Elections need to be held and the different factions need to come together.

The two-State solution is in danger of slipping from our grasp. Right now, damage control is a priority. The Quartet report issued earlier this year (S/2016/595, annex) is clear on the minimum actions required of both parties to safeguard the two-State solution. It is time the Security Council gave some real weight to its exhortations.

Leaders on both sides bear the heaviest responsibility in guiding their people in the direction of peace. At the same time, we welcome the effort of France to establish an international forum in which peace can be discussed.

The Israeli-Palestinian situation is bad, but it could get much worse. We urge the Council to bring its powers of encouragement and coercion to bear on the two parties to the conflict. The Council needs to act to protect the two-State solution.

The President (*spoke in Russian*): I now give the floor to the representative of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.

Mr. Al-Mouallimi (Saudi Arabia) (*spoke in Arabic*): At the outset, I would like to congratulate you, Sir, on your assumption of the presidency of the Security Council for this month. We wish you every success. We thank you in particular for convening this meeting on the situation in the Middle East, including the question of Palestine. I would also like to thank the Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process and the Under Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs for their valuable and important briefings at the beginning of this meeting.

Palestine has been occupied for half a century and the Palestinian people have been denied their right to self-determination. For half a century, the United Nations has been unable to assume its responsibility according to the Charter of the United Nations. For half a century — despite numerous international conferences, resolutions and advisory opinions — the Palestinian people have been languishing under the yoke of the Israeli occupation and suffering from the failure of the international community.

The international community has agreed on the illegality of the Israeli occupation and has been condemning Israel's aggressive practices against the Palestinian people, in violation of international law, including its settlement activities, its confiscation of Palestinian land and its use of excessive force against the Palestinian people. Israel continues to detain thousands of Palestinians, including women and children. Nevertheless, the international community has not taken any effective measures to put an end to the Israeli occupation and to hold Israel responsible for the occupation and for its repeated crimes against the Palestinian people.

My country therefore once again welcomes the French initiative to hold an international peace conference according to the terms of reference of the peace process and, most important, the Arab Peace Initiative, which my country put forward 14 years ago, and based on relevant Security Council resolutions. Those efforts aim to develop an effective international mechanism that would put an end to the Israeli occupation of the State of Palestine according to a set timetable.

We hope that in 2017 the world will raise its voice and say "Enough occupation." For over half a century, we have witnessed a lack of political will. We have witnessed stalling and denial of the rights of Palestinian people. During this half a century, we have seen attempts to stoke violence, terrorism and instability in the region and across the world. We call on the Security Council to adopt a measure that is up to the challenge. It should respond to this lack of accountability and it should take into consideration the gravity of those violations. It should courageously grant the Palestinian people its right to self-determination and its right to establish its independent State along the 4 June 1967 borders. It should ensure the liberation of all Arab territories, including the occupied Arab Syrian Golan and Jerusalem.

In that regard, I would like to welcome the latest resolution adopted by UNESCO, which admits that Jerusalem is an Islamic heritage. That is an important step towards fulfilling the international community's obligations to the Palestinian people.

I would like to refer you, Mr. President, to the statement issued on 4 October by the League of Arab States regarding the deteriorating humanitarian situation in Aleppo. According to the statement, the League is greatly concerned by the deteriorating humanitarian situation in Aleppo and other Syrian cities. The statement condemns, in the strongest possible terms, the heinous crimes committed by the Syrian regime

against unarmed and defenceless civilians, and the continued systematic destruction of all infrastructure. The statement reaffirms that those practices run counter to all religious values. They are a flagrant violation of international conventions on the protection of civilians. They are a violation of international humanitarian law and international human rights law. Those practices once again prove that the regime is disregarding its most basic obligations, namely, to protect its citizens and to protect civilians.

The statement also condemns the heinous terrorist crimes committed by terrorist organizations, such as the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) and the Al-Qaida-affiliated Al-Nusra Front, across Syria. Crimes committed by the Syrian regime and by these terrorist groups amount to war crimes, and their perpetrators should be brought to justice. The statement also holds the Security Council — most important the permanent members — and those interested in, and concerned about, the Syrian crisis accountable and fully responsible for the continued humanitarian tragedy occurring before the very eyes of the international community. The statement also calls on the Security Council to promptly take effective measures in order to implement resolutions 2254 (2015) and 2269 (2016) in order to enforce the ceasefire and the cessation of hostilities and implement mechanisms to ensure humanitarian deliveries to besieged civilians.

My country welcomes the recent humanitarian pause and the promises to facilitate humanitarian deliveries. We are convinced that this is an initial step. We hope that it will lead to an air ban and a no-fly zone being imposed on the regime and its allies. The members of the Iranian forces should withdraw from Syria, together with the Hizbullah militias and the militias of other criminal groups. They should be held responsible for their crimes in Syria. Sieges should be lifted in all cities in Syria and humanitarian deliveries should be ensured without restrictions. All those steps would pave the way towards political negotiations based on a political transition according to the Geneva communiqué (S/2012/522, annex) and resolution 2254 (2015) and in line with the views of the High Negotiating Committee, in a manner that would meet the aspirations of the Syrian people.

My country reiterates its support for the efforts of the Special Envoy for Syria, Mr. Staffan de Mistura, in line with his mandate to ensure a political transition. We are committed to providing unconditional support to the Syrian people, while respecting its decisions in any way possible.

We support the friendly country of Iraq in its war against terrorist organizations. We support its operations to liberate Mosul. My country has been at the forefront with other countries to develop and build an international coalition against ISIL. However, we are greatly concerned by the participation of sectarian militias and armed groups in the liberation of Mosul. The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia has long warned against a return to vengeful criminal acts based on sectarian hatred, including the torturing of civilians and summary executions. We call on the international community and the Security Council to ensure an end to those practices and guarantee the protection of civilians.

The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia welcomes the initiative by Yemeni President Abdrabuh Mansour Hadi Mansour to extend an invitation to the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for Yemen and to halt military actions for 72 hours. The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia supports a permanent ceasefire based on the full implementation of resolution 2216 (2015) and in a manner that ensures a return to negotiations based on clear terms of reference and on the road map presented by the Special Envoy. There is a need to complete the political transition process as per the Agreement on the Implementation Mechanism for the Transition Process in Yemen, in accordance with the initiative of the Gulf Cooperation Council.

The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia will spare no effort to protect its national security and its borders against the repeated violations committed by Houthi militias and their allies, which have launched rockets against the Kingdom, including some with a range of more than 600 kilometres. We are surprised that the Security Council has remained silent in the face of Iran's flagrant violation of Council resolutions. Iran continues to smuggle weapons and rockets to the Houthis, in clear violation of the relevant Council resolutions. While the representative of Iran has shed crocodile tears over the victims of Yemen, those tears will fool no one, especially the citizens of Yemen. Yemenis are aware of the Houthis' intention to take control of the Government. They know that the actions of the Houthis are at the heart of their suffering.

Iranians have attempted to link events in Yemen to what has been committed in Syria, including the massacres. They have chosen to forget that the Syrian

regime deliberately targets hospitals and civilian structures, thereby seeking to eliminate all civilians in Aleppo. Those acts of the Syrian regime are in stark contrast to those of the international coalition, which seeks to ensure the safety of Yemenis.

We call on the Security Council to hold an urgent debate and to discuss the letter we addressed to the Council on 14 September regarding Iranian violations, including the smuggling of weapons to the Houthis. The Council should impose sanctions on Iran and on all those who violate Council resolutions so that the resolutions do not become dead letters and to ensure the Council's credibility across the globe.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Ecuador.

Ms. Yánez Loza (Ecuador) (*spoke in Spanish*): At the outset, I would like to thank you, Mr. President, for the invitation to attend this open debate of the Security Council.

At the same time, I wish to align myself with the statement delivered by the representative of Venezuela on behalf of the Movement of Non-Aligned Countries adopted at its recent Summit held in Margarita Island.

My delegation once again strongly reiterates the support of the Government and the people of Ecuador for the legitimate right of the Palestinian people to establish an independent State within the 1967 borders, with East Jerusalem as its capital, as expressed on 12 July in this very Chamber (see S/PV.7736). I would also like to renew our historic commitment to the cause of peace in the Middle East.

We once again express our concern about the ongoing absence of a decision and the lack of the necessary political will to implement the relevant Council and General Assembly resolutions, circumstances that undermine the international community's initiatives to resolve continuing conflicts in the region, thereby encouraging conduct that leads to systematic practices condemned by international law, including human rights law, international humanitarian law and even the Charter of the United Nations, as we have heard in the briefings presented by the Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process and Personal Envoy of the Secretary-General and by the Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator in this very forum.

Ecuador co-sponsored General Assembly resolution 67/19, which granted Palestine the status of a non-member observer State in November 2012. On 24 December 2010, President Rafael Correa was one of the first Heads of State to recognize the State of Palestine within the 1967 borders. As recognized in the Middle East Quarter report (S/2016/595, annex), we believe that a negotiated two-State solution is the sole path to achieve a durable peace that addresses Israel's security needs and the Palestinians' aspirations for sovereignty and independence and puts an end to the occupation that began in 1967. Only then will the Palestinian people be able to enjoy their inalienable rights. Their cultural and heritage rights have also been affected, as recognized just recently by the UNESCO Executive Board.

This legally constituted Organization has a duty to restore hope — and owes a debt — to the Palestinian people and to bring about the establishment of an independent State of Palestine, including joining the United Nations as a fully fledged Member, pursuant to the 1947 partition resolution (General Assembly resolution 181(II)).

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Maldives.

Mr. Sareer (Maldives): Let me begin by thanking the Russian presidency of the Security Council for convening this quarterly open debate on the situation in the Middle East.

This debate is taking place at a timely juncture when the world is in trepidation over the grave humanitarian situation in Syria, particularly regarding the escalating violence in Aleppo. We also take note of the Council's Arria Formula meeting that took place last week on the subject of illegal Israeli settlements, which was organized by Malaysia, Egypt, Senegal, Angola and Venezuela.

It is with great concern that my delegation joins many other States in noting the Security Council's inability to exercise the duties with which it has been entrusted by the international community in the Charter of the United Nations with regard to the maintenance of international peace and security.

The targeted attacks taking place in Aleppo completely disregard civilian populations and infrastructure and have resulted in the deaths of hundreds, including children and humanitarian aid

workers. Schools, hospitals and basic infrastructure have been annihilated, thus depriving an entire population of their basic rights and necessities. Decades of growth and development have been wiped out in the blink of an eye, with the future looking increasingly dark.

We expect the Council to use all appropriate means to protect innocent civilians, to end the escalating violence taking place in flagrant violation of international law and to ensure accountability for war crimes and crimes against humanity. The failure to act, resulting in the dire humanitarian crisis in Syria, sets a dangerous precedent for the role of the Council in addressing future conflicts. Therefore, Maldives calls upon all Council members to ensure the compliance of all States with the relevant resolutions of the Security Council.

In a similar vein, we also call upon the international community to enhance humanitarian aid — and upon the actors concerned to ensure unimpeded, continuous and full access to it for those in need. We must undertake every effort to alleviate and end the suffering that has been unjustly inflicted on innocent civilians in Syria. We also strongly urge all the parties concerned to engage constructively in political dialogue to bring about a sustainable and peaceful solution to the crisis and to refrain from resorting to further acts of violence, which could fuel and escalate the conflict.

The perpetuation of hostility and conflict in occupied Palestine, which has compromised peace and security in the region for decades, is another result of the Security Council's imparity and failure to exercise its responsibilities. The facts are clear. The excessive punitive measures and ongoing brutal violence by the occupying Power — the Israelis against the Palestinian people — have not only denied the Palestinians' fundamental human rights, but have also claimed numerous lives. The expansion of Israeli settlements through construction and the designation of land for exclusive Israeli use are in clear violation of international law, including the right to self-determination. Those activities extinguish any prospect of development or a stable future for the Palestinian people.

While Israel maintains the façade of being committed to a two-State solution, its actions clearly demonstrate the exact opposite. This year alone, settlement activities have expanded at an alarming rate, with the demolition not only Palestinian homes and property, but also of humanitarian infrastructure established by the international community. Maldives reaffirms solidarity with the Palestinian people and reiterates its call upon Israel for an immediate cessation of its settlement activities, which are illegal.

Although we believe that the agreed two-State solution to the conflict is ultimately a political one that can be reached only by the parties concerned, we also believe that it is the responsibility of the Security Council to facilitate the solution by setting the necessary parameters to maintain conditions on the ground that will enable them to work towards that goal in good faith. The current state of affairs, with the expansion of illegal Israeli settlements, coupled with continuing violence, is steering the conflict further away from the two-State solution.

Maldives commends and welcomes the numerous initiatives that have been undertaken by various Member States and the international community, including civil society, to address the situation in the Middle East. Undoubtedly, those initiatives have substantially contributed to alleviating the suffering of people affected by the conflict.

At the same time, we wish to emphasize that the duty primarily falls upon the Security Council. If the Council is unable to take adequate measures to maintain international peace and security, its current methodologies and strategies must be re-evaluated and changed. Maldives is ready to play its part in such an exercise.

The President (*spoke in Russian*): I now give the floor to the representative of Morocco.

Mr. Laassel (Morocco) (*spoke in Arabic*): At the outset, I would like to congratulate your country, Sir, on presiding over the Security Council this month and to thank you for holding this debate. It clearly shows your country's unfailing support for the Palestinian cause, particularly given current circumstances. I would also like to thank the Mr. Nickolay Mladenov, United Nations Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, and Mr. Stephen O'Brien, Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator, for their briefings.

The situation in the Middle East is worsening day after day, month after month. Its deterioration in the context of the future of the region is a great source of concern. First and foremost, we are concerned about the worsening situation in Palestine while the international

community is preoccupied with other issues. While the other issues are important, they should not distract the international community from the central issue in the Middle East, that is, the Palestinian question. It is a cause for all Arabs, all Muslims, who aspire to restoring peace and harmony in the region.

The Kingdom of Morocco, whose King chairs the Al-Quds Committee, is very concerned about what is taking place in Palestine, particularly in Jerusalem, which is the third most holy site in Islam. We condemn all attacks against mosques, against the faithful and against the legal status of the city itself. These attacks fuel violence and extremism. The attempts to Judaize the region, to erect settlements and expel Palestinians hinders any peace effort.

The international community must assume its responsibilities; it must find a way out of the current stalemate and to bring Palestinians back from the deadlock we have seen since the breakdown of the Israeli-Palestinian negotiations. The international community must spare no effort to bring the Israelis and Palestinians to the negotiating table in order to bring about the two-State solution, including the pre-1967 borders and with East Jerusalem as the capital of Palestine. The process must be carried out properly, in order to build the necessary trust for the two States to coexist in peace, in accordance with United Nations resolutions and the Arab Peace Initiative.

My country commends France's efforts to salvage the two-State solution, including its holding of a ministerial meeting in that regard, during which the Kingdom of Morocco restated its position regarding the Palestinian question, as it relates to the setting up of an independent Palestinian State within pre-1967 borders, with East Jerusalem as its capital. As King Mohammed VI, Head of the Al-Quds Committee, stated at the third Organization of Islamic Cooperation Summit, hosted by Turkey,

> "We cannot but affirm our support for the appeal of President Mahmoud Abbas to hold an international conference to put an end to Israeli occupation — a crucial step for stopping the tragedy in Palestine and achieving equitable peace, based on a two-State solution. We also support the French initiative that seeks the resumption of negotiations between Palestine and Israel."

The President (*spoke in Russian*): I now give the floor to the representative of Cuba.

Mrs. Rodriguez Abascal (Cuba) (*spoke in Spanish*): Cuba aligns itself with the statement delivered by the representative of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela on behalf of the Movement of Non-Aligned Countries.

The Palestinian people continue to suffer deeply. For almost 50 years, the illegal occupation of Israel and Israeli policies and practices have flagrantly flouted international law, including international humanitarian law. From October 2015 to date, Israeli military incursions have caused the deaths of over 200 Palestinians, some of them children. From the beginning of 2016 to date, 878 Palestinian structures in the West Bank have been destroyed or confiscated by Israeli authorities, which represents a 60 per cent increase as compared to 2015 and the most structures destroyed in a single year since 2008. New settlement construction in the second quarter of 2016 was higher than at any point during the past three years.

How long will the Security Council stay silent, hostage to the United States veto or threat of veto? How long will the Council allow Israel to act with impunity as it commits crimes against the Palestinian people? Cuba once again calls on the Security Council to assume its responsibilities under the Charter of the United Nations for the maintenance of international peace and security, and to adopt the necessary measures to demand that Israel immediately end the occupation of Palestinian and other Arab territories; the blockade of the Gaza Strip, the building and expansion of Israeli settlements and the separation wall in occupied Palestinian territories; the destruction and expropriation of Palestinian land and property; forced displacements; and the transfer of settlers to illegally occupied Palestinian land; among other violations of international law, international humanitarian law and United Nations resolutions.

Until the Security Council shoulders its responsibilities, Israel will continue to consolidate the occupation, making the two-State solution impossible and undermining the attainment of a fair and peaceful solution to the conflict. Cuba applauds regional and international efforts under way to resume Israeli-Palestinian peace talks. We reiterate that the Security Council must fulfil its obligation to promoting a negotiated solution that ends the Israeli occupation of Palestinian territory. The only possible solution to the Palestinian question is the peaceful coexistence of two independent States, with the establishment of an independent, sovereign and viable Palestinian State

with its capital in East Jerusalem and with pre-1967 borders.

Cuba reaffirms its full support for the admission of Palestine as a full Member of the Organization and calls on the Security Council to take a decision to that end. If it does not, the General Assembly should act with full determination to resolve the matter. Cuba welcomes the willingness of the State of Palestine to lead the work of the Group of 77 in the near future. Its leadership will honour the Group.

We condemn the politicization of the crisis in Syria and the manipulation of the humanitarian situation and the suffering of the Syrian people by some members of the Council, which, to serve their own geopolitical interests, are pursuing the declared objective of imposing regime change in Syria. These same members too often forget the great humanitarian needs in the besieged Gaza Strip, where more than 1.3 million of the 1.9 million Palestinian residents need help.

Those who have fuelled the conflict in Syria, providing weapons and funds and sponsoring terrorist groups from outside, are responsible for the thousands of civilian victims of the conflict and for the humanitarian situation in the country. Cuba regrets the loss of innocent lives as a result of this situation and condemns all acts of violence against the civilian population in Syria.

The threat posed by extremist groups in the country, some of which are using terrorist methods, is the main challenge facing that Arab nation. The fight against this scourge in Syria should be part of the collective efforts to find a solution to the crisis. Cuba rejects the promotion of an interventionist agenda in the guise of the fight against terrorism. We demand that violations of Syria's sovereignty cease, and that the foreign military presence, which does not have the consent of — and whose operations are not coordinated with — the Syrian Government, the sole legitimately elected authority in the country, be brought to an end.

A political solution through dialogue and negotiations and without preconditions is the only viable solution to the conflict in that country. Peace in Syria can be achieved only by respecting the right of the Syrian people to decide their own destiny without outside interference and without impositions. We support the Syrian people in their aspirations to live in peace and choose their destiny.

All conflict situations in the Middle East should receive the same attention by the Security Council. The achievement of the peace, security, well-being and development that all peoples, including those of the Middle East, deserve will depend upon the Council's decisive action. Cuba reiterates its support for a just, comprehensive and lasting solution to the conflicts in the Middle East, which will safeguard the sovereignty, security and territorial integrity of all States in the region.

The meeting rose at 4.25 p.m.